Thresholds and reconnections: the creation of the child in comparative children's literature

by

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Dissertation Abstract:

Thresholds and reconnections: the creation of the child in comparative children's literature

This dissertation follows the history of children's literature (of the French and English languages) to draw a portrait of the psychological and educational repercussions it has on the audience it mobilizes.

The assumption held that fiction created by adults for children gives a mirror image of – or an insight on – life may not obtain for children's literature. The genre abounds with paradoxes – written by outsiders for beings that are often depicted as separate or other, encouraging children to live their childhood fully while teaching them the means to outgrow it, aiming to be both representative and generative, etc. – that raise the question of the genesis of the fictional child and its use.

If childhood itself is a fiction, can the narrative analogies offered by the young protagonists be taken as serious tools to widen our knowledge of the child?

With the support of interviews from authors and an inquiry conducted with editors of the genre, this dissertation reflects on children's literature and questions the validity of its dualistic or simplifying nature to not only confront what being a child entails, but also what it means to be an adult.

Under the direction of Dr. Jacques Neefs, Department of German and Romance Languages and Literatures, and Dr. Anand Pandian, Department of Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University.

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Warning:

Unless otherwise specified, all the translations of literary and critical works will be mine.

All of us come to life in a sea of stories. They sketch what we desire and fear. They take us back to times and places we thought were gone and to others that we've never even imagined. Woven from the many threads of our experience, they form patterns we didn't expect to follow.

Stories are fragile and ephemeral things […]. Still, we need [them] to make sense of this world and to judge how best to live with its challenges and possibilities.

- Anand Pandian (9-10)

Introduction:

"You have brains in your head.

You have feet in your shoes.

You can steer yourself any direction you choose"[1]

Childhood and storying are closely linked, and both often elicit a sense of infinite possible, whether accurate or not. For most people, one of the fondest memories of their youth will be the adventures lived in books and the special connection felt towards that one character. There is an intensity to childhood that leads to narratives being devoured, at the same time ephemeral – like a child jumping from one experience to the next – and everlasting – leaving us with a taste that will carry through adulthood, memories of simultaneously feeling alone in the world and oddly connected to humanity while reading. I, for one, can still remember long summer hours spent sailing the Mississippi on my makeshift pillow raft, channeling an inner Huck Finn and sustaining myself on apples and books *à la* Jo March. "Often read to pieces, those books [of childhood] took us on voyages of discovery, leading us into secret new worlds that magnify childhood desires and anxieties and address the great existential mysteries," writes Maria Tatar in her preface to the *Annotated Fairy Tales*. (xi) But this is not the story of good times past. If childhood and children's literature are held dear by grown-ups, what do we know of the impact of the genre on those that are primarily concerned, these odd creatures we call children? Aside from the pleasure they may induce, are stories even necessary to their growth?

[1] Dr. Seuss. *Oh, The Places You'll Go!* New York: Random House, 1990. Print. 2

The universe of childhood is everywhere: from bookshops to libraries, television, cinema, toy stores, arcades and amusements parks, etc. Childhood is not only a concept but also a flourishing market that fascinates and holds the young as well as the not so young anymore. Who does not occasionally indulge in a "retour en enfance" (return to childhood), as the popular French saying goes? And so one reads in Roland Barthes: "From the past, it is my childhood, which fascinates me most; these images alone, upon inspection, fail to make me regret the time which has vanished. For it is not the irreversible I discover in my childhood, it is the irreducible." (22)[2] And in today's society, everything is done to make this exploratory journey back somewhat possible. France counts about 200 amusement parks, 800 toy stores and a near thousand specialized bookstores. The UK has similar numbers and the US 4 to 5 times that. But the truth is, if today's society knows and sometimes even encourages a type of regression towards a child-like state (not to say childish, at times), the state of being a child is a very modern notion.

The condition of being a child, and not merely a small, unfinished adult, is an idea that emerged around the second half of the 18th century in Europe. Contemporary philosophers in England, France and Germany started to find interest in childhood through the realization of the impact theirs had left on them. This is how Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for example, felt the need to write his *Confessions* where he nostalgically evoked memories from his childhood while detaching himself from his younger self's

[2] Barthes, Roland. *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. Translated by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977 (1975). Print.

ways of reasoning. Such writings were part of how childhood came to be contemplated as a stage separate from adulthood. It was acknowledged as being a vulnerable time, a fragile step in life development that needed to be protected at all cost, as well as propelled in the right direction. The article "Enfance," written by d'Aumont in the *Encyclopedia*, explained childhood as being a state lasting until one reaches the age of reason, around seven years old: "ENFANCE, s. f. (Médecine.) C'est la première partie de la vie humaine, selon la division que l'on en fait en différents âges […]; ainsi on appelle enfance l'espace de temps qui s'écoule depuis la naissance jusqu'à ce que l'homme soit parvenu à avoir l'usage de la raison, c'est-à-dire à l'âge de sept à huit ans." [3] Other contemporary writings contemplated childhood as being continuous until about seventeen years old, or younger if the "child" was to be married before that – a belief that would be kept in the 19th century.

The notion of the child then was new and in constant redefinition. It was nothing like a modern reader would expect. And when it came to literature for children, the reactions were quite ambivalent. Indeed, contrary to the tender feelings children's books and bedtime stories may awaken in today's world, fiction was then considered rather dangerous to the young impressionable ear, and welcomed various approaches. In truth, there was actually very little to no fiction at all for children written in Europe at the time. Tales from the 17th century and before were still being read or recited to children. Yet, the new angles brought about by Rousseau and Locke regarding education made these highly moral tales less substantial. Not to mention the fact that these very tales were starting to be perceived as threatening rather than educational.

[3] "Childhood: it is the first part of human life, according to the division that we make of it in different ages […]; so we call childhood the space of time that runs from birth until the man reaches the age of reason, that is around 7 or 8 years old."

Modern readers have axiomatically integrated the idea that the most important factor in children's literature is the development of characters, allowing a process of identification in children that will help them grow and discover themselves. Yet, most stories for the young existing in the 18th century were fables and fairy tales, which mostly had flat characters. The emphasis was laid on one trait, serving the particular moral of the story. In no way was it conceivable that the child would or should bond with the protagonist on an emotional level. Rather, identification was perceived as something to be feared and avoided at any cost, for it would, or so it was believed, be a source of an emotive lack of balance in the future; a belief that would still be found in the 19th century, though mostly regarding the education of girls.[4]

The expansion of literacy that the century knew created a need for a redefinition of learning, and thus, 18th century Europe saw the emergence of new educational theories. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke, though differing from one another when it came to the implementation of their theories, both believed that practical experience, rather than admonition, was the most effective teacher. Childhood started to be perceived as a stage when one should pursue freedom and commune with nature. Diderot, for one, believed that fiction was as much created by the reader as it was by the author. It is understandable, given this fact, that children's literature would have been regarded as quite dangerous, in the light of the power it enclosed.

But the truth is that literacy was still limited and children's fiction had very little value, standing no chance compared to freedom and experience. 18th century education, though being the field for new ideas of self-development, was, in practice, rather stern.

[4] Fiction is regarded as the origin of Emma Bovary's downfall, for example.

No place was given to the growth of imagination through fantasy readings, which were considered an obstacle to the child's virtue. The purpose of raising children was to see them grow into grounded, virtuous individuals. Creativity and learning through amusement were not even conceivable. These are modern notions that simply did not exist at the time. On the contrary, fairy tales, because of their high content of fantastic elements were perceived as a danger to the development of the child's imagination. It was thought of as a type of fiction that would scare the child's self-awareness and result in a lack of confidence and reason.

The passion of reading, if not closely supervised, was thus believed to have the ability to create serious turmoil in a child. In *L'Histoire des imaginations extravagantes de M. Oufle*, the abbot Laurent Bordelon narrates how the main character of his novel came to believe he was a werewolf, after overindulging in books on demonology and witchcraft. A free and uncontrolled access to fiction could result in the confusion of reality and chimeras in the child. As French scholar Jean-Marie Goulemot summarizes it: "Le siècle demeure partagé malgré sa volonté de savoir, ses ambitions pédagogiques, entre l'obligation de lire et la peur panique du livre." (26)[5]

Yet the idea of the child was born, and so was that of a literature designed especially for him/her. As the 19th century was reached, the importance of said literature reached a very high level, as it started to be seen as a tool to educate children towards adulthood, as well as to help them with their personal growth. It was strongly tinged with a didactic dimension. Indeed, 19th century saw the diffusion of the German concept of

[5] "The century remains divided, despite its will to know and its pedagogical ambitions, between the obligation to read and the book phobia."

bildungsroman, or novel of formation, in Europe as well as in North America. As education became more accessible and generalized, novels were written in accordance to school programs. Contemporaries had started to recognize that one of the greatest assets of a literature for the young resided in the characters' development for it permitted an identification process on the readers' part that might help them grow and acquire the values that were deemed essential.

A configuration like that of the *bildungsroman* allowed the young reader to bond with the main protagonist. Through many twists and turns, both physical and psychological, and through facing inner struggles as well as external obstacles, the character was transformed into an accomplished person by the end of the story. Education principles of the time were banking on the mirror effect to hopefully incite the reader to also learn to do so. The French Comtesse de Ségur was particularly popular, with her highly moralizing narratives that strived to teach good manners, obedience and hierarchical recognition. Yet, she also shared the stage with authors like Jules Verne, Robert Louis Stevenson, Jack London or Mark Twain, to only name a few, who, inspired by the technological and geographical exaltation of the time, gave birth to the fictionalization of the child as an explorer. Narratives such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books also opened the door for characters' inner adventures, giving a new breath of life to the imaginary in children's literature and expanding its room for play, notably with the semantic field. Childhood, the way it was written in the 19th century, was a romanticized time of freedom that "met a strong emotional need in the general public," writes British literary critic Colin Manlove. (14) Yet it was a literary childhood that was essentially aimed at older children, little young men really.

With the turn of the century, the importance of children's literature grew even more and saw the appearance of a literature for all children, even the very young or the girls. Around the second half of the 20th century it became a distinct category in libraries, as well as a discipline in its own right, worth studying academically – although it was still done rather sparsely. Now, the genre no longer needs to justify its existence, with thousands of books published each year, mostly from Western Europe, North America and Asia. It has become a highly lucrative sector – with an ever-greater number of books being made into film series – to the point where some of its detractors have said the child was becoming a mere "commodity" to the publishing and film industries. Marie Saint-Dizier, a French writer and illustrator for children, states that, by the last quarter of the 20th century, "books for children very soon became considered as a purely commercial sector, having less to do with critique than advertising." (442) While the fact that quantity and profitability sometimes unfortunately prevail over the quality of the material is indisputable, so is the truism that fiction assumes a greater significance in the education of the young.

Contemporary society now has an increased awareness of the variety that the world of children's literature has to offer. It is with this width of range that the genre tries to reflect the needs and desires of its audience. Children's literature both tries to comfort children readers and make them grow, entertain them and infuse them with specific values and representations of the world. "What should children read? Should they read what adults believe will stimulate their intellect, stir their imagination, develop their sense of humor, strengthen their morals, further their understanding of themselves and

others, or simply what they most enjoy reading?," are questions that plague the industry of fiction for the young, as wrote American librarian and author Virginia Haviland.

The audience of children's literature has the particularity of being taken into consideration as both readers and individuals in construction. Yet despite these dual stakes, the genre is often branded as "simpler" than literature for adults and the tensions inherent to it are rarely taken into consideration. As American author Lloyd Alexander once said: "children's literature as a literary aberration, or at best a minor amusement, is a notion held most strongly by people who read the fewest children's books. I think it was Ruth Hill Viguers who compared this attitude with asking a pediatrician when he's going to stop fooling around and get down to the serious business of treating adults."[6] Very apropos joke aside, narratives for the young are indeed seldom as straightforward as they seem at first sight.

The assumption held that fiction created by adults for children gives a mirror image of, or an insight on, life may not obtain for children's literature. The genre abounds with paradoxes – written by outsiders for beings that are often depicted as separate or other, encouraging children to live their childhood fully while teaching them the means to outgrow it, aiming to be both representative and generative, etc. – that raise the question of the genesis of the fictional child and its use. Children's literature "hangs on an impossibility, one of which it rarely ventures to speak. This is the impossible relation between adult and child. Children's fiction is clearly about that relation, but it has the remarkable characteristic of being something which it hardly ever talks of," writes British academic Jacqueline Rose. (1) Indeed, the child protagonist is nothing but a multilayered

[6] *A Visit with Lloyd Alexander*. Dir. Savatteri, David. New York: Dutton Children's Books & Puffin Books, divisions of Penguin USA. 1994. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtECLFD4n0Q>. Web

construction (social, historical, cultural, etc.) born out of the grown-ups' minds, and if some scholars are aware of it, the fact remains that it is something that, due to the field being still relatively recent, remains to be explored more in depth.

Children's literature is also the only category of literature to be written by people other than its implied audience.[7] Fiction for the young is a very intentional literature. It targets this postulate of a child reader that is but a fantasy, an invention of "the child we made and were" that seems to feed itself – being influenced by the construction that is the child and affecting it in return. The appellation child protagonist poses the problem of being too generic, as is the categorization of children's literature. Indeed, what constitutes a book for children? And how are the borders of the genre delimited? There is a universalism present in children's literature that raises the questions of whether all books for the young are equal, and whether all children protagonists are the same? The recipients of children's literature vary in age and expectations – the pre-reader (from babyhood to 4 or 5), the beginner reader (5 to 7 or 8), the independent reader (around 8 to 11 or 12) and the teenager (13 to 16-17) cannot yearn for or gain the same things from their readings – yet the term embraces all readers from the 3 year-old whose parents read to, to the adolescent. What creates the category of children's literature is the younger age of the target audience, but the broadness and vagueness of the name are one of the many constitutive tensions of the genre. Jean Perrot, eminent French specialist, once claimed that "the only realistic definition of a child's book, as ludicrous as it may seem, [was] the following: it is a book that appears in the catalogue of an editor for the young." (Soriano 568) This may be going a bit far but it nonetheless voices the fact that the ideas we have

[7] Despite minor failed attempts at publishing narratives written by children, the genre remains quasi exclusively written by adults. It is in the school context, rather, that the practice of fictional narration is developed in the young.

of children and the books they should read are nothing but self-made constructions, stories in themselves.

Now if childhood itself is a fiction, could the narrative analogies offered by the young protagonists be taken as serious tools to widen our knowledge of the child? And what are the literary conditions necessary to the creation of the fictional child? For lack of evidence or tangible sources, could it be possible for the fictional aggregation itself to take on a sort of authority on the subject that is the "child"?

These questions piqued my curiosity and led to the beginning of this project. This dissertation will follow the history of children's literature (of the French and English languages) to draw a portrait of the psychological and educational repercussions it may have on the audience it mobilizes. It will not tell the story of publishing for children but will explore the idea of the child character, from the construction of the fictional universe of childhood in which he/she evolves to the stage when it is expected that he/she leaves the child behind for adulthood, via a closer look at the adults' feelings of otherness towards children that transpire in most works.

From creating the child to striving to liberate it from childhood (as will be further analyzed in the later chapters of this dissertation), I started wondering what exactly makes children's literature and what it strives to do. Although carried by the paradigm of a genre motivated by educational purposes of self-awareness, poetics of the domestic as well as notions of ethics and justice, children's literature opens the way to many experiences. Indeed, its reading rarely stands alone and so for a plethora of reasons among which is the fact that narratives for the young often pour themselves in reworkings through real-life pretend play. Another reason why it is more ambiguous than the term

"children's literature" might suggest is that it is not always directly delivered to the target child, but filtered though an adult mediator who participates in a peri-readership context. It is a "polyphonic literature, three-voiced, that takes place, between the author, the reader out loud and the reader-listener-spectator, maybe even four-voiced if we take into account the editor," corroborates French scholar Nathalie Prince. (11) Writing the child is layered and complex, it relies on the all possible and the infiniteness of ephemerals associated with childhood to relay axiological lessons. My aim with this project was to explore the tensions and ambivalences upon which the genre rests and to reflect upon what they may teach the readers as to what the child, real or fictional, is.

Children's literature, still a fairly new genre of study, stands in the margins and is regarded as a-temporal. As such, it is more often divided thematically than chronologically, which will also be the case in this dissertation. I decided to follow the growth of the fictional child structurally, from picture books to the journey towards adulthood, in order to better ponder on the creation of children's literature and its relevance to the real-life child. My work is the product of a combination of structured analyses and a taste for literature. I wished to stand on the threshold of what makes the literary in fiction for the young. Reflections on the genre of children's literature tend to exist halfway between the exploration of its intellectual worth and a deliberate lyricism, and I wanted to get a closer look as to why that is. The "mentir-vrai" (or art of truthful lying), – to borrow French poet Louis Aragon's neologism – which is the appanage of literature, is at the heart of the literary object that children's literature constitutes. The child protagonist is set in situations that are supposed to echo universal motives of children interests and needs. Contrary to 18th century beliefs, identification is now

thoroughly encouraged. The fictional character is designed to mirror an imagined child reader who, as was previously mentioned, is a postulate perpetrated by the genre, which is why it will be maintained in this dissertation – as pertaining to the universe of fictional childhood. The way this thesis was written might surprise but it artfully falls in with the genre that it aims at deciphering, and thus was more relevant to its study.

The corpus used in my research will cover the canons of English and French children's literature along with the latest 21st century trends; market and creativity going hand-in-hand when it comes to children's literature. The decision to approach the subject from a comparative perspective came from the observation of how very closely entwined the two languages have been since the birth of a literature for children. Indeed, it is the French concept of childhood that first influenced England, at the time of the philosophers of the Enlightenment (as was explained earlier in this introduction), but a reversal occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s. From then on the Anglo-American canons have had a very strong influence upon what is written and published in France. Yet if the themes are shared, the way of treating them may differ, as will be seen later in the chapters.

Over the course of my research I have had the opportunity to meet the people that pull the strings of children's literature: writers, illustrators and editors. They were gracious enough to withstand my interrogations, giving me new threads to follow, different orientations to contemplate and sometimes even more questions to mull over. With the support of these interviews from authors and illustrators, as well as that of an inquiry conducted with editors of the genre, this dissertation will thus reflect on children's literature and question the validity of its dualistic or simplifying nature to not

only confront what being a child entails, but also what it means to be an adult – because of its bivalent relation.

Despite the large scale it encompasses in terms of time span and the comparative corpus, this project will however neither discuss comic books – though it will include picture books – nor films and TV series. It will not delve into the depth of gender issues in literature for the young either. Gender roles in children's literature are a very interesting and important question, yet many studies focus on it and it was not what I chose to explore with this project. My aim was indeed to study the idea of the child protagonist as a fiction in itself.[8]

To facilitate this examination, this dissertation has been divided into three main parts. The first part will deal with the construction of an imaginary of childhood, in the literature that targets it. It will consist of three chapters, which will reflect upon the malleability and multiplicity of the fictional child, how its voice is expressed within the semantic elasticity that the field offers, and whether it holds any credit at all – it being after all but the voice of a masked grown-up. It will also explore the ways in which literature – with the help of the extraordinary, the quirky, but also the familiar – may help its audience understand themselves and their surroundings, as well as develop into "competent interpreters of the social world," as British sociologist Allison James once claimed children to be. (2001 246)

The second part, also made of three chapters, will delve into the otherness that the child is felt to be and that permeates through narratives for the young. In the fascination –

[8] For more on gender in fiction for the young, please refer to: Simons, Judy. "Gender Roles in Children's Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010: 143-158. Print; or to: Clark, Beverly Lyon, and Margaret R. Higonnet. *Girls, Boys, Books, Toys: Gender in Children's Literature and Culture*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. Print.

dare I say obsession – for animals that can be found in children's literature since its origins lie great interrogations on the human condition. How is one otherness, that of the animal, used to portray another, that of the child? And why does it know so many variations, from anthropomorphism to metamorphosis and hybridity? It seems that the depth with which animality and otherness are tackled grows stronger as the age of the target audience progresses, as will be analyzed. It is as if the child could represent a wild echo of the human existence in these awakened dreams that books are. French philosopher Gaston Bachelard said of literature that "its function is one of substitution. It gives new life to lost opportunity." (1948 72)[9] This seemed to me like it might be especially true when it came to children's literature and its writers' inherent nostalgia towards a lost time of supposed freedom as well as their desire to escape adult responsibilities and be closer to nature. The second part of this dissertation will aim at establishing whether or not that hypothesis remains upon further analysis.

As for the third and final part of this dissertation, it will be divided in two chapters, to explore how literature for the young basks in the biggest tension that characterizes it: teaching the readers how to be a child, from interests to behaviors, etc., only to better teach them how to outgrow it when they reach the third or fourth stages of readership (i.e. the independent and teenage readers). One of the main goals that children's literature tasks itself with is the subjectification of its audience and, contrary to popular beliefs, it has developed a wide variety of ways to do so, from blatant mimesis to metaphorical learning, among others. Torn between the liberation associated with a time

[9] Translated by Kenneth Haltman in: Bachelard, Gaston. *Earth and Reveries of Will, And Essay on the Imagination of Matter*. Dallas: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 2002 (1948). Print.

when all is deemed possible and the restrictiveness of an extremely didactical genre, how does fiction for the young understand itself and its efficiency?

As of today, the genre of children's literature remains quite isolated, despite the rise of critical studies. It stands as the other to so-called adult literature, in a similar fashion to the way the child can be an other to the grown-up. Yet, what I have discovered is that it tells its readers as much about the child as it does about the adult who hides behind it. But I am getting ahead. After all, the pleasure of reading resides in the deciphering of mysteries, and so let us begin our adventure as well, with the words of American author Madeleine L'Engle: "I believe that good questions are more important than answers, and the best children's books ask questions, and make the reader ask questions. And every new question is going to disturb someone's universe." (23)

Chapter 1:

Extraordinary and ordinary: storying and imaginary play

Children's books paint quite a peculiar portrait of childhood. Filled with magic – good or evil – and not subject to the common rules of physics or language, the universe of children's literature is in itself some kind of a "Neverland," a no-space that can hold all spaces, so long as they can merely be imagined. Everything is possible in children's literature, which aims at both giving a fair reflection of children – and their playing – and at handing them the tools towards a successful growth. Common thought willingly endows childhood and its literature with the ability of 'creative distortion,' as Walter Benjamin called it. Children claim ownership of their environment by awarding it with qualities, personalities and *raison d'être*, forgoing all adult claims of rationality for the sake of playing, understanding and gaining power over things. "The extraordinary intellectual plasticity of youngsters [is such that] the intelligence of the child [actually] grows in the fertile ground that is the imaginary," claims French psychologist Annie Rolland (21). Imagination is at the core of childhood and its literature. Its complex mechanism is the source of constant theories in children's developmental and behavioral psychology yet seems to be mere obviousness to authors of children's literature.

French historian Paul Hazard, in *Les livres, les enfants et les hommes*, asserted the existence of an actual separate world of childhood and considered its inhabitants as competent interpreters of the social world (42). The fact that, during childhood, the ego is

still in the process of being formed creates a very fuzzy boundary between the self and others, the self and the world, even between humans and animals.

> Not yet fully socialized, the growing child has yet to embrace the adult notion that thinking and feeling are capacities exclusive to us and our kind. Since children lack that sense of self-importance, in their nondualistic thinking, and as talking animals [in literature] suggest, consciousness is permitted to exist or acknowledged to exist in the world at large,

explains American scholar Jerry Griswold (109). Children blur the lines that we might draw between self (or selves) and others. To them the whole world is alive. It comes to life as they lay eyes upon it. The wind blowing through the leaves of a tree is something they do not rationalize but explain as the tree just shaking off a little stiffness. If, for children, it is naturally a matter of making sense of their world by self-explaining it with notions that are fathomable to them, the fact remains that, for these new definitions they create to be applicable, it is essential for them to believe in their legitimacy. The ambiguity of believing in a self-made thing is at the heart of childhood and children's literature. Reality and fantasy are narrowly intertwined and seem to possess the same level of importance for the child.

Objects and words have no meaning or purpose but the ones we give them and the high malleability of children's imaginary allows them not to affix one unique – and logical – meaning or purpose to them but a true multiplicity. In children's play, as in their literature, the membrane separating imagination from reality is porous. In their blurring of delimitations, children pave the way for daydreaming and make-believe stories. The

latter will allow them to meet their needs for creativity but will also make their lives comprehensible, through explanations fit to their outlook on the outside world. This, however, does not make them into mere passive observers of their environment, for they actually sculpt it in return. This ability of children to transform and mold their surroundings goes by the name of make-believe or pretend-play.

Anthropologists, as we shall see in this chapter, have established that play is a spontaneous activity engaged in by all children, no matter what social and cultural context they grow up in. “Living in a world created before them, […] children carve out one of their own,” writes professor of anthropology Veena Das. (263) Not only does play contribute to a healthy emotional and cognitive growth but, through it, children also learn to develop social and hierarchical behaviors that will ease their future integration into society. “It is generally acknowledged that children are in need of play and that if they are deprived of play, disastrous consequences may ensue,” argues scholar Jenny Holt in her article ““Normal” versus “Deviant” Play in Children's Literature: An Historical Overview.” (34) Play holds such an important role in the healthy development of the child that it has even been fully endorsed in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, adopted in 1989. Indeed, Paragraph 1 of Article 31 of the Convention stipulates that “State Parties [must] recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.”

For the child, imaginary play might actually be the only form of play to be fully unmediated by adults, and as such, represents one of the greatest fields for the study of childhood. Pretend play is indeed an open window upon the child's thinking skills. If

nowadays children's dream houses are sought after like “Plato's cave of ideas” (Griswold 25) – in order to get a better insight of their emotional state, the way they perceive the world around them and the cognitive connections they build, – it is important to point out that it was not always the case. “The imagination has had an uneven and controversial history in the modern period. For most of the time it was considered secondary and ancillary and sometimes even a dangerous human faculty,” explain professors Bernd Huppauf and Christoph Wulf in *Dynamics and Performativity of Imagination* (2). After the very birth of the concept of childhood in the 18th century, as was examined earlier, imagination along with fiction itself were long considered to be damaging to the young impressionable ear. Freedom of play was perceived as something to be feared and avoided at any cost, for it was believed to be a source of future emotional imbalance; a belief that would exist as far as the 19th century, though mostly regarding the education of girls. Today, the power of imagination, or *einbildungskraft* (the power to form inner pictures), is seen as being crucial to both a self-understanding for the child and an in-depth perception of the child by the parents, along with anthropologists, psychologists and authors. “As an activity and an idea, play furnished a bridge from the study of children to the analysis of literature, from the simple drawings and stories of children to literature by and for adults,” believes children's literature specialist Kenneth Kidd (120). French expert Michel Defourny concurs with Kidd's idea that play and children's literature offer a privileged area of reflection, not only on itself and on the child but also on most varied and important concepts: “since its origins, youth literature has never stopped exploring [...] intermediate or marginal spaces.” (9) Make-believe play, with its

very fuzzy boundaries between imaginary and reality, is at the core of these transitional spaces.

To fully understand the importance that make-believe plays in the growth of the child, we must first define the two crucial concepts that are play and imagination.

For children, play is first and foremost a solution against boredom, which represents one of the biggest obstacles of their lives. It is a potential space for all-playful experiencing to take place. During playtime, children can be as almighty, cruel, kind, imitating, original, hierarchical, rule breaking, sharing or selfish as they wish to be. It is a highly serious activity. The American Collegiate Dictionary *Merriam-Webster* defines it as a "recreational activity spontaneous [...] of children." The entry for "jeu" in the 9th edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* reads: "Activity in which one indulges to have fun, to entertain oneself, without there being anything at stake." Play is thus believed to be inborn and the expression of one's freedom. Imagination is defined in both dictionaries as "the act or power of forming a mental image of something not present to the senses or never before wholly perceived in reality, […] a creative ability."[10] How does pretend play, the combination of said spontaneous recreational activity and creative ability, operate in children then, and why?

Showing its first signs when the child is about 2 years old, make-believe, according to play therapist Shlomo Ariel, consists of the animation of a mental picture, the act of "breathing life into it."(6) If this definition is undeniably correct, it nonetheless raises the question of how a child can then be able to distinguish such a fictitious – though living – image from reality?

[10] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/imagination

Pretend play is temporary and requires several steps of formation and adherence. Not only does it involve the child's thinking skills but it also is the expression of a physical act, thus embracing both the body and the mind. “In a state of play,” observes anthropologist Margaret Trawick while studying the lives of children under the civil war in Sri Lanka, “you delineate a space and a time within which the ordinary rules of life are suspended, and other rules are created and brought into force. You must forget the ordinary world, which distracts you from the play.” (10) Children actually need to believe in their self-made assumptions in order for pretend play to be enacted. New rules and concepts of space and causality are created and temporarily adopted during the time allotted to play. Jean Piaget, who was one of the first to acknowledge and study what he called ‘symbolic play’, believed that it allowed children to rework their immature concepts of reality in accordance with their own cognitive schemas. “Symbolic play represents, in thought, the pole of assimilation and thus assimilates freely reality to the self.” (1945 175) Pretend play does indeed allow children to play with their knowledge and concepts, to recreate situations or behaviors under a new light so they might be understood and integrated, which is why it is now acknowledged as essential to the healthy growth of the child and as being an open window on the child’s mind. Yet, Piaget saw the fact that make-believe calls for assimilation from the child, rather than assimilation of the child, as being slightly problematic:

> But why is there an assimilation of reality to the self, instead of the universe being immediately assimilated to logical and experimental thought? It is simply because this thought has not yet been constructed in early childhood and, even if it were to be elaborated, it would far from

> suffice to the needs aroused by daily life. Moreover, the most adapted and most logical thought that the child is able to produce is still pre-logical and egocentric, with a structure precisely in between this symbolic thought, which blossoms through playing, and adult thought.
>
> In other words, [...] symbolic play is nothing but pure, raw egocentric thought. (1945 175)

Piaget believed that, as such, it made a poor tool of study of childhood, not painting a fair portrait of its reality, according to him. I beg to differ. Make-believe is undeniably the assimilation of reality from children, which, to begin with, is rather positive for children to form understandable bridges in their heads, but, as a consequence, it also helps with children's assimilation to reality, letting them work their way in with the help of the new cognitive schemas they elaborated through play.

Pretend play is thus essential to the study of both childhood and its fiction. It is at the very core of the liminal space that is childhood. Neither real, due to the creative distortion children display within it, nor entirely fictional, since they do carry their own conceptual knowledge with them, pretend play is one of the best tools of research there is. "Playing is inherently exciting and precarious. This characteristic derives *not* from instinctual arousal but from the precariousness that belongs to the interplay in the child's mind of that which is subjective (near-hallucination) and that which is objectively perceived (actual, or shared reality)." (Winnicott 1971 52) Make-believe is the epitome of that interplay English pediatric psychoanalyst Winnicott was describing. It transforms children into both playwrights and actors, and gives great insight as to how they unconsciously see and feel the world around them. "When children engage in role play,

they do not simply remain off-stage directors or puppeteers. They enter into the make-believe situation that they create and adopt the point of view of one of the protagonists within it. The real world recedes into the background and is replaced by the make-believe landscape and experience that would be available to that protagonist," adds American psychologist Paul Harris (31). The make-believe becomes their temporary reality. Through it, children can experience new ideas, feelings and perceptions that they distort to adapt to the new roles they have adopted. From feeding a doll and imitating mommy ironing clothes to building forts with cushions and pretending to be a knight fighting off dragons, or even jumping inside chalk drawings *à la Mary Poppins*,[11] pretend play is infinite in its possibilities but very often requires appropriate conditions.

Although it is to be found everywhere and in all children of the world no matter their living conditions, – as was shown by Trawick's work in Sri Lanka, – for make-believe to be enacted the child still needs to feel somewhat comfortable. Often, such activities will be held in secret, magic hideouts and snug places; a tree house, a fort made

[11] *Mary Poppins*. Dir. Stevenson, Robert. Walt Disney Studios, 2013 (1964). DVD.

of cardboard, a tunnel of cushions, a palace under a tablecloth, etc. Enclosed, tight, simple but above all remote, safe, self-sufficient, owned and hidden, the snug place is a biological need to the state of childhood and the stage of pretend play. It rests on a necessary belief, or joint belief when several players are involved, that the new animated image birthed by the child is "actually present in the external environment, as a concrete reality." (Ariel 7)

Many examples of such beliefs and dream caves of ideas can be found in children's literature and media. For example, four-year-old Mei, in Hayao Miyazaki's *My Neighbor Totoro*, finds both peacefulness and exciting self-made fantasies under the wings of the enormous camphor tree; a relief to her mother's ill condition. The supernatural being that is Totoro appears as she is worried about her mother and bored alone at home because her father is too busy working to come play with her.[12]

Mei's safe haven, as well as all snug places in general, is a threshold into the world of imaginary play. She enters it to find comfort but also distraction, running into it by following self-invented creatures and playing with the self-projected giant Totoro she heard about in tales before succumbing to dreams, sleeping on the dirt. This also is quite a common vision within children's literature.

[12] *Tonari no Totoro (My Neighbor Totoro).* Dir. Miyazaki, Hayao. Studio Ghibli, 2010 (1988). DVD.

Such imaginary games and thresholds are indeed a veritable truism of the books aimed for the young. Roald Dahl's *Big Friendly Giant*'s eponymous character is well known for catching happy dreams in a net, the way one would butterflies, and blowing them into children's ears with a trumpet-like blowpipe.[13]

Pretend play and fiction both let children travel within their minds, and use nonsense to entertain and make sense of their world. "There are really only two kinds of [children's] literature [...]," affirms Tim Wynne-Jones in an article on literary thresholds:

> those books which mirror the child's life, his environment and expectations, and therefore give him a secure sense of belonging to society. And those books which are thresholds to the world beyond the home and his day-to-day experiences: the Arctic sea, the Nile, the Moon, the house of one's crotchety next-door neighbour – all places about equally as far away for the [child]. [...] Just about everything is a threshold for a six-year-old. (Egoff 60)

Both play and books represent a potential space "between the individual and the environment ([or] object)" (Winnicott 1971 100) or, as we could just as adequately call it, a space of potentials. They both are an exercise of malleability and represent a favorable environment for children to express and reinforce their thinking skills and imagination. "Children's literature is a creative art. It is of course conceived creatively but it is just as importantly received by an audience which is itself in a continual state of flux and re-creation." (Johnston 34) Children's literature gives children the tools they need to modify

[13] Dahl, Roald. *The BFG*. London: Puffin, 2013 (1982). Print. 83

and remold the characters, plots and spaces of the story *ad infinitum*. Great ideas can emerge from a single sentence or image. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* is a wonderful example of how such patterns come to life and how essential it is not to have them suppressed by adults. On the first page, the narrator explains that, when he was six, he saw an amazing picture of a boa swallowing a wild beast in a book about Nature.

The drawing had this legend: "Les serpents boas avalent leur proie toute entière, sans la mâcher. Ensuite ils ne peuvent plus bouger et ils dorment pendant les six mois de leur digestion." (1)[14]

For the then child narrator this image became the source of a new world of possibilities. It created in him a whole new cognitive correlation, birthing a creative expression of his inner comprehension of not only the picture but also the functioning of human nature and the world:

"J'ai alors beaucoup réfléchi sur les aventures de la jungle et, à mon tour, j'ai réussi, avec un crayon de couleur, à tracer mon premier dessin. Mon dessin numéro 1. Il était comme ça :

" (1)[15]

[14] "Boa constrictors swallow their prey whole, without chewing it. After that they can no longer move, and they sleep through the six months they need for digestion."
[15] "I pondered deeply, then, over the adventures of the jungle and, finally, with a crayon, I succeeded in sketching my first drawing. My drawing number one. It looked like this:"

When the narrator then showed his drawing to the grown-ups, asking them whether or not they were scared, only incomprehension followed: “Pourquoi un chapeau ferait-il peur ?” (2)[16] But the drawing was not a hat; it represented a boa snake digesting an elephant. If this story does sound like a sweet trifling childhood anecdote, what Saint-Exupéry is actually trying to show us readers – children and grown-ups alike – is the high potential of the child’s imaginary and how precious it is. The author believes that, as such, it deserves to be nurtured instead of shut down in favor of factual reality. Make-believe seems also to be here to teach grown-ups about the wisdom to be gained from children. After all, the elephant inside the boa is a tangible psychological reality for the child. So is the sheep inside the box for the little prince later in the story:

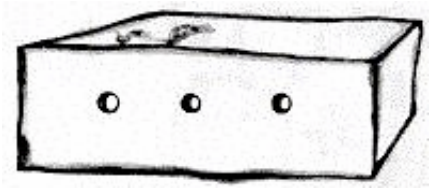
— Non ! Celui-là est déjà très malade. Fais-en un autre.

— Tu vois bien… ce n'est pas un mouton, c'est un bélier. Il a des cornes…

— Celui-là est trop vieux. Je veux un mouton qui vive longtemps.

“Alors, faute de patience, comme j'avais hâte de commencer le démontage de mon moteur, je griffonnai ce dessin-ci.

Et je lançai:



- Ça c'est la caisse. Le mouton que tu veux est dedans.

Mais je fus bien surpris de voir s'illuminer le visage de mon jeune juge:

[16] “Why would a hat be scary?”

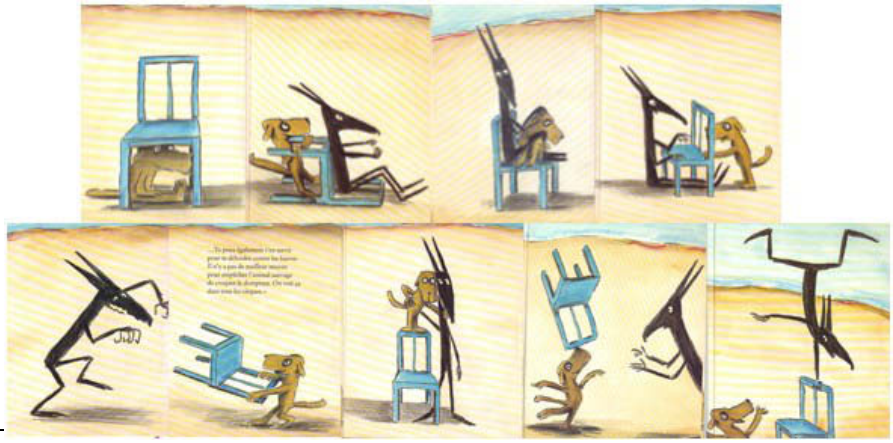
- C'est tout à fait comme ça que je le voulais !" (6-7)[17]

What matters most is not the actual sheep but the idea of the sheep. Having it set, fixed on the page is of no interest to the child compared to making it move, eat, sleep, live inside the mysterious box. The same thing can be said of the elephant inside the boa. Seeing it does not open new imaginary thresholds. After all, if we do not see the elephant being digested, who is to say it might not just walk out or arrange itself a nice little bedroom inside? Children's literature permits actual facts and marvel to exist side-by-side, the way they do within children's minds. "The act of reading," supports Annie Rolland, "offers children a space of mental play that allows them to "model" to infinity the psychological objects stemming from the imaginary." (48) In an essay entitled "Unpacking my Library," Walter Benjamin wrote that children "can accomplish the renewal of existence in a hundred unfailing ways." (1996 2: 487) This is the exact purpose that playing serves. Through story making, both literal and imaginary, children make their lives more interesting, fighting off that dreaded boredom, and more understandable, trying out new roles and alternate perspectives. Children can thus experience their own voice or breathe life into somebody else's mind. Children tend to be fully open to these potential variations and use them freely. Through make-believe activities children can replay their surroundings and give sense to them. Margaret Trawick believes that their environment and social class shape children but it would also appear that children shape their surroundings in return as well. To perceive children as mere recipients of information and victims of authority would be too restrictive a view.

[17] "- No! This one is already very sick. Draw another one. / - Look... this is not a sheep, it's a ram. It has horns... / - This one is too old. I want a sheep that will live a long time. / Then, for lack of patience, as I was in a hurry to start taking my engine apart, I scribbled this. / And tossed: / - This is the box. The sheep you want is inside. / But imagine my surprise in seeing the face of my young judge light up: / - It's exactly how I wanted it!"

Culture and family do play a role in shaping how children will behave, think, play, act and even talk, but these very same children will also shape, in part, whatever and whomever they encounter. This is why "fantasies," as Trawick calls them, remain essential despite some unfavorable circumstances. Such re-shaping can be seen in Claude Boujon's picture book *La Chaise Bleue,* where the two anthropomorphic protagonists find a chair in the middle of a desert and morph it into wondrous objects:

> "Ils s'approchèrent et découvrirent une chaise. "C'est une chaise," dit Escarbille. "C'est une chaise bleue," compléta Chaboudo…qui s'en fit immédiatement un abri. "J'aime bien les chaises," déclara-t-il, "on peut se cacher dessous." "C'est le minimum du minimum," lança Escarbille. "Une chaise c'est magique. On peut la transformer en traîneau à chiens, en voiture de pompiers, en ambulance, en voiture de course, en hélicoptère, en avion, en tout ce qui roule et vole…et tout ce qui flotte aussi." "Mais alors, attention aux requins qui rodent aux alentours," ajouta Chaboudo qui prenait goût au jeu. (6-13)[18]



[18] "They got closer and discovered a chair. "It's a chair," said Escarbille. "It's a blue chair," added Chaboudo…who used it as a shelter right away. "I like chairs," he said, "you can hide underneath." "That's the basics of the basics," claimed Escarbille. "A chair is magical. It can be transformed into a dog sleigh, a fire truck, an ambulance, a racing car, a helicopter, a plane, into anything that rolls and flies…and anything that floats as well." "But then, watch out for the sharks that are prowling around," added Chaboudo who was starting to really enjoy the game."

Play and nonsense prevail in Boujon's story. There is no plot whatsoever, just the staging of pretend play. The chair undergoes multiple metamorphoses. As the two protagonists voice their new ideas on what purpose could serve the chair so it transforms. Boujon here tries to mimic children's play in their rapid ephemerality and the secret connections of their cognitive schemas.

> "Et ce n'est pas tout," reprit Escarbille. "En deux temps trois mouvements, elle devient un bureau, un comptoir. Il n'y a rien de mieux pour jouer à la marchande." "Oui," approuva Chaboudo, "une chaise, c'est vraiment magique, mais c'est aussi très pratique. Si tu montes dessus, tu deviens aussi grand que le plus grand de tes amis… Tu peux également t'en servir pour te défendre contre les fauves. Il n'y a pas de meilleur moyen pour empêcher l'animal de croquer le dompteur. On voit ça dans tous les cirques." "Et dans les cirques," poursuivit Chaboudo sur sa lancée, "des acrobates, des jongleurs s'en servent pour exécuter des numéros formidables. Tout comme ça." (14-20)[19]

The two characters even address the audience directly in their play, using "tu" (you) while cataloging all the games the child reader could reproduce along with them. The simple dialogue and ordinary play tell the readers that they also can turn common things into the extraordinary. Joint belief is displayed as the two characters here share the

[19] ""And that's not all there is," Escarbille went on. "In less time than it takes to say it, it becomes a desk, a counter. There isn't anything better to play shopkeeper" "Yes," agreed Chaboudo, "a chair, it truly is magical, but it's also very convenient. If you climb it, you become as tall as your tallest friend… You can also use it to defend yourself against wild animals. There is no better way to prevent the lion from biting the tamer. You see this in every circus." "And in every circus," Chaboudo kept going, "acrobats and jugglers use it to execute amazing acts. Just like this."

make-believe, which can also teach children how they can not only create new imaginary patterns but also spread them, or add to them with the assistance of a friend.

Pretend play and environment shaping can be seen as ways for children to center themselves and develop their sense of self, by creating things they can call theirs. Make-believe can satisfy the child's profound need to belong and to have things and people belong to him/her. Naturally, the best-known example of nonsensical playing is to be found in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, which overflows with make-believe and games of all kinds. The Queen's game of croquet sounds like it is coming straight out of a child's imagination or daydream. "Alice thought she had never seen such a curious croquet-ground in her life; it was all ridges and furrows; the balls were live hedgehogs, the mallets live flamingoes, and the soldiers had to double themselves up and to stand on their hands and feet, to make the arches." (66) And, of course, how best to obtain colored flowers than to paint them the desired shade in a toddler's mind? (62) Alice is a perfect embodiment of make-believe, almost literally leaving her old self behind – first in the garden by her sister and those boring school lessons to learn as she follows the white rabbit and falls down his hole, then on the proper side of the mirror as she traverses it – to better enter the life of someone else, a new Alice, with a new empowered voice and new adventures to be lived. All in Carroll's *Alice* books is riddle and play, often seeming gratuitous and free

but also calling for reflection from the stern adults of the story. In the midst of all the nonsense, through doorways both real – like a rabbit hole – and fictional – the other side of a looking-glass –the child reader can learn that fun should never be forgotten, that all sizes are equally important and that, sometimes, the things that worry or anger us are not that significant. For the writer nonsense gives birth to all relevant logic and learning. Carroll offers to his readers the necessary distance and hint of humor to make the topsy-turvy world around them bearable.

> The spirit of play predominates in Carroll's comedy. He is *Homo ludens* asserting his right to divert himself and seek pleasure for its own sake. [The *Alice* books] present a strategy for mastering experience through play, nonsense and games. They are modes for temporarily changing and controlling reality, but they also become ways of reflecting and criticizing the arbitrariness and absurdities of life. Something in Carroll […] says that life is so absurd that only play can illuminate it or make it mean anything worthwhile. (Polhemus 368-9)

The creative manipulation of space observed in children and their literature can also be seen as an escape from the outside world and thus would be just as essential to a child in an adverse situation as to an "ideal" child-protagonist.

Anthropologist Veena Das, in an article entitled "Voices of Children," also argues towards this idea of the child shaping the world. Set in the context of an Indian Muslim community, Das considers the child as both object and subject to the world. "In his own play and games [the child] gives [the world] an inner reality; he subverts it; submits to it; learns how to organize his experience so that he is not merely a character in someone

else's story but can create a narrative of his own." (264) One particularly striking sentence from Das's article gives perfect sense to the omnipresence of make-believe in the lives of all children. She writes: "He is both the one who is spoken about and the one who speaks." (264) Das qualifies children's play as the reenacting of the things they see; the festive occasions just as much as the inequities and violence they encounter. Games have the important and didactic role of revealing meanings and giving an understanding of their lives to children. Children's play, along with children's literature, shows us a fascination that goes both ways. There is a desperate need on both sides to understand the other, and find their place. "The world of children and the world of adults meet on many points. They have a kind of floating relationship, which cannot be described through analogy or polarity alone. Children's play reproduces the world of adults in some contexts and transforms it in others."(Das 279) Das adds that playing "enables the child to take the voice of the other" (280). This is a significant argument for it meets with the aim of fiction to give voice to the child, in return.

Giving a voice to the child, real or fictional, is also what make-believe permits. Indeed, pretend play and the porous boundaries between reality and fantasy that are common to childhood allow children not only to make sense of their world but also to escape the troubles of their lives. "Literature is the only « hors-monde » that is left to us," as French writer Camille de Toledo holds true.[20] When it comes to children, I believe that literature shares its precious mental escape place equally with the world of make-believe. Imagination flies us towards a story-space, a Neverland, that can be anything we wish it to be, safe, interesting, passionate, happy, etc. "Of course the Neverlands vary a good deal," explains J.M. Barrie's narrator.

[20] Words collected on October 25th 2013, in a conference given at Johns Hopkins University.

> John's, for instance, had a lagoon with flamingoes flying over it at which John was shooting, while Michael, who was very small, had a flamingo with lagoons flying over it. John lived in a boat turned upside down on the sands, Michael in a wigwam, Wendy in a house of leaves deftly sewn together. […] But on the whole the Neverlands have a family resemblance, and if they stood still in a row you could say of them that they have each other's nose, and so forth. (14)

Make-believe and literature are all Neverlands for children to inhabit, feeling secure and adventurous, a place for them to feel all-powerful when, in the real world, all things and people are there to remind them how fragile, small and powerless they are. In *Peter Pan*, the narrator goes on describing the nature of a Neverland, recalling the child's vital need for snugness that was mentioned earlier: "Of all delectable islands the Neverland is the snuggest and most compact; not large and sprawly, you know, with tedious distances between one adventure and another, but nicely crammed. When you play at it by day with the chairs and table-cloth, it is not in the least alarming, but in the two minutes before you go to sleep it becomes very nearly real." (14-15) If the worlds of imagination were indeed a safe place, why would Barrie seem to alert the readers of their dangers? Could the fantasy actually take over and harm children instead of helping them comprehend their world and giving them a more secure sense of themselves? In order to figure out whether or not this might be the case, we need to understand how Barrie's Neverland works and how his renowned character of Peter Pan became its symbol.

"All children, except one, grow up," Barrie's narrator carries on. (7) We are all familiar with the adventures of the mischievous Peter Pan in Neverland, fighting off

pirates, befriending Native Americans, and flying away with a happy thought and a pinch of pixie dust. But why would a child want to escape growing up, when so many others actually reproduce adult behaviors in their play? "'It was because I heard father and mother,' [Peter] explained in a low voice, 'talking about what I was to be when I became a man.' He was extraordinarily agitated now. 'I don't want ever to be a man,' he said with passion. 'I want always to be a little boy and to have fun. So I ran away to Kensington Gardens and lived a long long time among the fairies.'" (41-42) For Peter, Neverland was the only way to get liberated from a future in which he would not have had a say. Neverland is, to its main inhabitant, an escape from inner fears, which are actually mostly self-generated. What really strikes the reader, though, are the rules of Peter's pretend play. All little boys are welcome to share Peter's Neverland, if they do not wish to grow up either, but they must blindly obey their companion and never question any of his decisions or actions. Peter is undeniably the selfish, cruel and childish but also innocent all-powerful leader of Neverland. This becomes even more obvious when the idea of the lost boys leaving the island to grow up is raised. As Wendy and her brothers are being taken to Neverland, the narrator somberly reveals: "The boys on the island vary, of course, in numbers, according as they get killed and so on; and when they seem to be growing up, which is against the rules, Peter thins them out." (72) Although, this is only written in passing, it unveils a very strictly ruled game of pretend play. Even if the idea that once you get there you shall never leave sounds quite harsh for a children's story, it actually reflects the world of childhood rather well. Children have the imaginary power to turn the most ordinary objects into fantastic ones, but they can also create deadly perils, monstrous pirates and decide who is to live or die in the game, as everything in the world

of childhood is perceived as temporary and reversible. Yet, what Barrie hinted at is that, no matter how fun and elaborated, it should remain a game and not overtake reality.

Another example of make-believe and magic used as an escape from reality can be found in Roald Dahl's *Matilda*. In the novel, young Matilda is raised in a middle-class British family who does not understand her; crooks obsessed with money and the television.

> It's a funny thing about mothers and fathers. Even when their own child is the most disgusting little blister you could ever imagine, they still think that he or she is wonderful. [… But Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood] looked upon Matilda in particular as nothing more than a scab. [… They] looked forward enormously to the time when they could pick their little daughter off and flick her away, preferably into the next country or even further than that. (4)

The little girl, though, is bright and eager to learn and read, which her parents find to be the strangest and most useless of pastimes. ""A *book*?" he said. "What d'you want a flaming book for?" / "To read, Daddy." / "What's wrong with the telly, for heaven's sake?" (7) Little Matilda finds relief in books and the imaginary trips she takes along them. She uses make-believe to flee her morose everyday life, taking part imaginarily in the stories she reads avidly. She lives through the lives of others, stealing time away from her reality: "The books transported her into new worlds and introduced her to amazing people who lived exciting lives. She went on olden-day sailing ships with Joseph Conrad. She went to Africa with Ernest Hemingway and to India with Rudyard Kipling. She travelled all over the world while sitting in her little room in an English village." (19)

Books allow Matilda to break away from her parents and envision herself as powerful and autonomous. They represent Matilda's defense mechanism against the powerlessness she feels as a child in a family that despises her. The characters she lives through by proxy are all brave and adventurous, fighting off the seas and the fates to triumph, and they traverse Matilda's imaginary games to become a true inspiration in her real life as well. As she gets angrier and angrier each time her parents or her school headmistress – the evil Miss Trunchbull – misbehave, magic powers awaken inside of her and nervous, fragile and dreamy little Matilda is reborn into a serene and confident child: "A strange feeling of serenity and confidence was sweeping over her and all of a sudden she found that she was frightened by nobody in the world." (233) She can feel the powers building behind her eyes, warming her entire body and giving her the confidence coming from higher knowledge. It is both a physical and psychological experience. Make-believe was first a haven but became truly empowering for the child protagonist. It comes to show the young readers that being small does not mean they cannot be tough and handle the things that come their way, good or bad. The interesting thing is that as soon as the threats are gone – the Trunchbull has left never to return and her parents have agreed to Matilda living with the sweet Miss Honey – Matilda's powers simply vanish, only to leave in its wake the happy make-believe that comes from reading. ""Something strange has happened to me, Miss Honey." […] "This morning," Matilda said, "just for fun I tried to push something over with my eyes and I couldn't do it. Nothing moved. I didn't even feel the hotness building up behind my eyeballs. The power had gone. I think I've lost it completely."" (326) There is no longer a need for extraordinary powers, Matilda can now believe in her reality as much as she believes in her pretend play adventures. What should

be retained is that Roald Dahl teaches his readers that imagination and literature can be a way to escape from abuse as well as be the source of the physical power and mental strength needed to overcome all sorrows. Reading can help children to build themselves, as subjects. It – along with pretend play – teaches the child how to be a being. Children's play is to be taken seriously for "our childhood's imagination structures the reality of our future." (Rolland 102) Children who engage in activities such as pretend play "are more joyful and smile and laugh more often than those who seem at odds with themselves" (Singer 64), and this is the very case with Dahl's Matilda.

Developmental psychologist Sara Smilansky has established that socio-dramatic play (or pretend play) plays an important role in the development of language and cognitive functions.[21] Role-playing and creativity require the generation then exploration of a new idea or concept. It allows the child to interpret the world he/she lives in, as well as working out the consequences of certain behaviors.

Make-believe is vital to the growth of the child and can be found in all cultures, at all time. Though of course its presence varies in amount and intensity, it nevertheless is a universal doing. Its existence pervades anthropological and ethnographic studies, just as much as it does children's literature. Anthropologist Naveeda Khan, in "Of Children and *Jinn*: An Inquiry into an Unexpected Friendship during Uncertain Times," recognizes the liminal position of childhood. In the article, Khan observes the lives and beliefs of Islamic families in Pakistan. She explains that, according to them, young children have the ability to connect and communicate with the divine. She gives the example of a little

[21] Klugman, Edgar, and Sara Smilansky. *Children's Play and Learning: Perspectives and Policy Implications.* New York: Teachers College Press, 1990. Print.

girl and how her interactions with a spiritual being called "jinn" influences the rest of her family's life:

> As an eight-year-old, Maryam had a window into the spirit world, channeling communications between the jinn and her family. At times she would look into the palms of her hands to see what the jinn would have her see; at other times, the stories about her relationship to the jinn suggest her ability to see how this world was intertwined with the jinni world, which was a mirror of this one. She saw the jinn interspersed among her family members. She relayed the requests of the human world to the jinn to seek their advice, instructions, and sometimes their expressions of desire. (240)

Being a child means having the ability to communicate with divine beings, blur the lines between objects, beings and animals, and also re-interpret and re-shape surroundings. Imaginary play will allow children to become competent interpreters of the world around them. Playing is an innate behavior in children that will help them grow into confident and autonomous beings. The case of Maryam is not that different from all her literary counterparts; through imaginary play she gains a place to call her own inside her family, she is of importance because of what her imagination conveys to her parents, and Matilda became whole thanks to the way she listened to and followed the path of her imagination. Her powers were also what liberated Miss Honey from under the yoke of her terrible aunt, the Trunchbull, thus granting her a recognized status among the people that surround her.

> *It is play that is universal*, and that belongs to health: playing facilitates growth and therefore health; playing leads into group relationships; playing can be a form of communication in psychotherapy; and, lastly, psychoanalysis has been developed as a highly specialized form of playing in the service of communication with oneself and others.

The natural thing is playing,

advocates Winnicott. (1971 41) Playing, like make-believe, is a cathartic experience, purging children from fears, joys, questions, etc. Their imaginary skills give them access to emotions and inner powers they might not be able to master, or even get in touch with, otherwise. Pretend play is thus a sign of health and internal strength. Through the excitement provided, children explore their creativity and toy with the notions of belief they have; belief in the make-believe, in themselves, in other people should they share the game, in their ability to adapt to new scenarios and situations, and so on. "Playing is immensely exciting. It is exciting not primarily because the instincts are involved; […] the thing about playing is always the precariousness of the interplay of personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects. This is the precariousness of magic itself, magic that arises from intimacy, in a relationship that is being found to be reliable," argues Winnicott. (1971 47) Again, we find this recurrent idea that fun is interlaced with the profound need for safety and trust, as well as a feeling of power over things, when it comes to the magic that stems from imaginary play.

Speaking of the supernatural, fantasy – which overflows with all things magical – is believed to have become the "figurehead of the imaginary at the beginning of the 21st century" (Ruaud 161) and that for children, adolescents and adults alike. It comes as no

surprise when we have a look at the novels that are sold and read the most on an international scale: the adventures of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and Erik L'Homme's *Le Livre des étoiles*, to only name a few. Pretend play and role-playing have reached a whole new level with these best sellers. Readers have become avid fans, growing up alongside their literary counterparts. "I like the Harry Potter books because they are like real life but more interesting," explains 14 year-old Melissa Stevens. (Moore 17) Melissa's comment is very helpful because it comes to reinforce the idea that fantasy, or make-believe, be it in real children's play or in literature, always has the same goal of transforming reality – and real objects, like Boujon's blue chair – into something better, more interesting, sometimes extraordinary even.

Fantasy is defined as "something that is produced by the imagination" (Merriam-Webster) and, as a literary genre, refers to stories where protagonists will often cross a portal into another world that is not limited to the boundaries of our real world – that is to say that the characters will often resort to magic to pursue the journey or quest that has befallen them. Following the canons that are the *Alice* books (with the fall into the rabbit hole and through the looking-glass) and *Peter Pan* (who needs to fly towards the second star to the right "and then straight on till morning" (38)), all the recently acclaimed series for children and young adults obey the very same rules and have similar takeoffs. Harry Potter needs to get through platform 9 ¾ at King's Cross station in London, the children of *Narnia* crawl through an opening in an old wardrobe, and Lyra cuts windows between worlds in *His Dark Materials*. In *Le Livre des étoiles*, the main world, Ys, holds a liminal position between the Certain world – that is the real world, from which it was separated

after a cataclysm – and the Uncertain world, full of darkness and mystery. Two doors located in Ys allow people to cross. All these stories have a literal threshold permitting characters to leave reality behind for the profit of a new existence defined by new rules. It thus has a resonance with pretend play in the fact that the entry into the other, magical, dimension is established first and defined as a separate and temporary place to inhabit. Indeed, all the protagonists from these stories travel back and forth between the coexistent realms, even when magic pervades reality, like it is the case with the *Harry Potter* series. Surely, even if Rowling's characters have the ability to practice magic outside of the wizard world once they are of age, such use is highly controlled by the Ministry of Magic working in collaboration with the actual British Prime Minister. All forms of play – real, fictitious or imaginary – need and respond to rules.

These novels also share the fact that their characters are everyday children, powerless and small; they could be the very reader for all we know. And, just the way it happens with objects and spaces in pretend play, along the journey the ordinary child becomes extraordinary, which is the main reason for their boundless success. French author Erik L'Homme, in an interview he graciously gave me at the 2012 edition of Montreuil's Salon du livre et de la presse jeunesse, explained his affection for young characters and fantasy: "Making a child grow into an adolescent in a fantasy book is the best thing a writer could experience. Indeed, by doing so, one can encompass many a change in their character's life and personality. The magic of adolescence and the infinite realm of the fantasy genre allow for an ever-changing, ever-evolving character, and plot,"[22] just the way imaginary play can transform all things and beings. In such tales, children protagonists become the heroes of their own stories and, as such, deeply

[22] Courtesy of Erik L'Homme.

resemble the child reader's imaginary life. The fantastic is what allows children – fictional or real – to grow in their awareness of themselves, develop their ego but also acquire a sense of responsibility anent the people or things they have control over in the story or the playing, and to work towards being able to take care of themselves, physically and emotionally. The ability to lapse into an imaginary world or the story space is a clear sign of mental strength and health. "An attractive fictional character […] establishes a field of imaginary experiences loaded emotionally and sensibly, in the face of the principle of reality incarnated by social constraints," writes Annie Rolland (29). Imaginary play and literature actually invite the child to think beyond the boundaries of his/her vulnerability or limitations and to draw attention to the wonderful adventure that can be ordinary life.

The one character that is the biggest source of a variety of make-believe games derived from the novels – and the highest identification rate in readers – is the famous British wizard created by J.K. Rowling. What actually makes Harry Potter so appealing is that he is the typical child, an "Everychild," to borrow American professor Roni Natov's term (311): average looking with unruly dark hair and green eyes, a scar barring his forehead, clumsy, small, on the skinny side and wearing glasses.

Not exactly the physique one would expect of a hero.[23] There is nothing special about

[23] Jim Kay's illustration for the September 2015 Bloomsbury new edition of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, London.

him at first sight. Every single one of his readers could look like Harry and be Harry, just a regular child with no particular skills in sports or classes, which makes identification one of the novel's strong suits. "I have a sticker that looks like a lightning bolt that I stick on my forehead. Then I look like Harry Potter, because I wear glasses, too," explains 6 year-old Carter Brown Grotta of the role-playing/make-believe games he engages in with his friends. (Moore 9-10) Harry is so reachable in his portrayal, both in the way he looks and the problems he encounters, – from mean teachers, to fights with friends and girl problems – that the young readers need nothing more than a pair of glasses and a sticker to feel like they can channel him, be him.

An orphan, Harry is raised by his aunt and uncle – "perfectly normal [people], thank you very much" (1: 9)[24] – who dislike him deeply and make him sleep in a cupboard under the stairs. He receives neither affection nor possessions from his so-called family and can only rely on himself and the daydreams he sometimes indulges in to cope. "I accept there's something strange about you, [but] probably nothing a good beating wouldn't have cured," Harry's Uncle Vernon even told him once. (1: 116) His cousin, who is the same age, is the very opposite of him, fat, spoiled dumb and brutal. Harry could not be more vulnerable and powerless than he is presented to be at the beginning of the series, sleeping locked in his cupboard and being his cousin's "favorite punching bag". (1: 45).

Therefore it is not surprising that, when he learns that he is special, a wizard, Harry can hardly believe it, convinced that Hagrid made a mistake and took the wrong child: ""Hagrid," he said quietly, "I think you must have made a mistake. I don't think I

[24] For quotations, the *Harry Potter* books will be numbered according to their chronological order: 1 referring to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and 7 being *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows.*

can be a wizard.”” (1: 119) His insecurities are deeply rooted at the beginning of the first novel. Although he did a few magic tricks in the past without realizing it, he always believed them to be coincidental accidents, which, on top of everything, got him in trouble with his caretakers who thought of him as a freak of nature:

> “You knew?” said Harry. “You knew I’m a — a wizard?”
>
> “Knew!” shrieked Aunt Petunia suddenly. “Knew! Of course we knew! How could you not be, my dratted sister being what she was? Oh, she got a letter just like that and disappeared off to that — that school — and came home every vacation with her pockets full of frog spawn, turning teacups into rats. I was the only one who saw her for what she was — a freak! But for my mother and father, oh no, it was Lily this and Lily that, they were proud of having a witch in the family!” (1: 109-10)

Harry is the very definition of the anti-hero or the underdog, modest and insecure, due to years of neglect. He is nothing but a normal child at the beginning of the series. His being a wizard is actually not even revealed until page 105 of the first novel, giving the opportunity for the reader to get to know him as simply Harry, the “Everychild”, with bullying problems and regular interests, like the zoo. Harry is given the time and space to grow physically and emotionally throughout the series. He meets friends, discovers his inner strengths, develops his powers and learns how to control them, but also becomes aware of his flaws and weaknesses, to better accept and work around them. Magic is a metaphor for imagination, and how it can make one grow psychologically, but also how it should always be used wisely and at appropriate times – with the Ministry of Magic representing children’s needed ability to learn control over themselves, and not merely

over external things and beings. The child reader can actually grow along Harry, J.K. Rowling having deliberately published her 7 novels over the span of 8 years, taking young Harry and his followers from vulnerable childhood to confident adulthood. Having to go through the literal wall of platform 9 ¾ to enter the wizarding world echoes the need for bravery, broad imagination and open-mindedness – leaving one's preconceptions and prejudices behind, rationality and the laws of physics, time and space included – that also are a requirement of all children's pretend playing. Only then can the child use his/her creativity to reverse the innate powerlessness that comes with being a child. It is this powerful potentiality of make-believe and imagination in general – to overcome and transcend – that magic epitomizes in fantasy novels for the young. "Magic embodies the imagination, stands in for what is beyond the power of children, perhaps anyone, to actualize. Often we can envision long before we can create the means to flee or resolve what feels overwhelming. This is particularly true for children," adds Natov (316). There is wisdom to be gained from imaginary play. Magic is what will give Harry a voice, what will allow him to resolve all the problems and traumas of his childhood and adolescence. As the story goes, and his magic grows in power and control, Harry morphs from the insecure, vulnerable orphan into a confident and wise young boy, surrounded by friends and a surrogate family made from the people who are dear to him. No longer learning to live with the problems that befall him, Harry, thanks to the power of his imaginary, knows how to pick his battles – when to fight and when to let go. Professor Dumbledore can almost be a figment born from his imagination, teaching him what he already knew deep inside but could not process without the magic and reflection of make-believe. Thus, Harry first teaches himself the need to protect oneself and to stand one's

ground: “It was important, Dumbledore said, to fight, and fight again, and keep fighting, for only then could evil be kept at bay, though never quite eradicated…” (6: 1349).

And finally, after willingly offering his life for the greater good, he returns to the threshold that is King’s Cross Station spiritually, before deciding whether to live or embark on another journey. The metaphor of the bright white station – empty but for an apparition of the late Dumbledore on one side and a battered, diminished Voldemort on the other – is of course not lost on the reader. Just as the physical crossing was a requirement for Harry to show braveness and a will to outgrow his inner fears, so is the psychological crossing that Harry will now make into adulthood, by processing all of his past choices and future options:

> “I’ve got to go back, haven’t I?”
>
> “That is up to you.”
>
> “I’ve got a choice?”
>
> “Oh yes.” Dumbledore smiled at him. “We are in King’s Cross, you say? I think that if you decided not to go back, you would be able to… let’s say… board a train.”
>
> “And where would it take me?”
>
> “On,” said Dumbledore simply. (7: 1524)

In a similar way to how Barrie had his Peter Pan believe that “to die will be an awfully big adventure,” (132) so does Rowling let her character and readers know that all decisions made are like imaginary trains taking us on a new journey, and that we all are free to embark on or stay behind, for where is adventure to be found but merely where we put our mind to play?

> "Tell me one last thing," said Harry. "Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?"
>
> Dumbledore beamed at him […].
>
> "Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean it is not real?" (7: 1525-6)

Imagination allows the extraordinary to pour itself into the ordinary, whether it be about everyday objects, like Boujon's power of the mind over a simple blue chair or Rowling's biting books and Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans – with a taste range that goes from chocolate and peppermint to liver and earwax – or, about metaphysical concepts of life, death and all that is in-between. Imaginary play, or magic, basically "calls attention to the awe and wonder of ordinary life." (Natov 315)

Play and imagination are central to childhood. They play integrative cognitive functions in the child's healthy development and are – without being limited to – a source of production of knowledge. Imaginary play allows children to explore many a world and to portray a wide spectrum of personalities and emotions. It gives them a newfound power to balance the status of vulnerability that happens to be their everyday lives. Through play, children can gain understanding of and control over their surroundings, while reshaping them to their liking. The child can toy with what is and what could be, breathing life into the potential minds of things and others. Make-believe holds a liminal place between fiction and reality, fun and learning, ordinary and extraordinary.

> Despite its momentary suspension of reality and its quality of assimilation, play also enables children to make sense of their world and

> accommodate to it by the very act of bringing it down to size. Play allows children to experiment with different roles, acquire language skills, and gain control by organizing a game's plan or themes and applying what they learn in a play sequence to the everyday cognitive and social demands of life,

concur American psychologists Dorothy and Jerome Singer (67). Imaginary play is first and foremost an exploration. So is children's literature, offering a profusion of lands and characters, naturally inclined towards play, not only in its narratives but with its design – shape, texture, colors and sounds are carefully selected – and the new technologies that are now offered – ipad, kindle, reading jukebox[25], etc.

The essence of both children and their literature is play and potentiality. "On the seashore of endless worlds […] children have their play," wrote Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, illustrating this very idea that, for the child, all is as much pretense as it is real. (339)

Holding this transitional place between the imaginary and reality, pretend play could be – and actually has been in the past, as we saw earlier – perceived as a dangerous game for children to indulge in. However, make-believe, like all other types of play, is

[25] The media juke box was designed for children and teenagers, allowing them to switch between books and videos of authors' interviews, leave comments on their readings, as well as play with some of the stories set in (guessing what is to come, etc). The jukebox was an interactive feature of the Pôle Ados (teenagers' section) at the 2012 edition of Montreuil's Salon du livre et de la presse jeunesse.

temporary and subjected to rules. When Rowling's Harry Potter makes the discovery of the Mirror of Erised – which shows the viewer his or her utmost desire – and finds himself lost in the longing for and illusion of his parents, the author warns her readers, through the intermediary of Professor Dumbledore: "This mirror will give us neither knowledge or truth. Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible. […] It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live, remember that." (1: 414) The desires locked at the heart of the Mirror of Erised – pun intended, of course, by Rowling who is a fan of anagrams – and of pretend play are to be taken seriously and not dismissed as children's silliness. They are a reflection of the child's inner thoughts, fears and quest for his/her self-awareness and identity. Yet, as useful as they might be to children and their observers – i.e. authors, anthropologists, psychologists, etc. – it remains essential to hint at the child that imagination can be as destructive as it is a source of creativity, should it be abused. One can get lost in it and lose sight of their true self, just as J.M. Barrie's warning had foreshadowed. As such, a balance is necessary for a healthy growth and the role of children's literature is to entertain but also to prepare the child for these obstacles, external and self-made, that he/she will undoubtedly encounter in his/her journey towards adulthood. "Almost all of us live in a mix of play and necessity. Both are essential to human existence, and neither is better than the other," explains anthropologist Margaret Trawick (10).

Imaginary play is essential to children, teaching them about themselves and others, places and things, reality and dreams, time, control and rules. It is a wondrous source of fun for children as well as a precious insight into the child's mind for grown-

ups. Pretend play and children's literature embody the belief that the ordinary can be magic and that we can become anything we want, so long as we set our mind to it, for what could be more powerful than mind and imagination? As Roald Dahl once advised in his story *The Minpins*: "Watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you because the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places. Those who don't believe in magic will never find it." (48)

Chapter 2:

"When *I* use a word […] it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less,"[26] or the fascinating enigma of the child protagonist's speech

Pretend play, as was seen previously, is an essential part of the healthy growth of the child. Interestingly enough, it emerges "around the same time as speech" (Harris 27) which also plays a significant role in the life of the child, real and fictional. Indeed, through both make-believe and the new acquisition of words, children can relay their thoughts and communicate their needs. Language is what makes the world available and malleable to the young. Learning to talk, to play with and on words, to quiet or express their thoughts and to communicate their feelings, is one of the biggest milestones children will go through as they grow.

Speech is defined as the "power of expressing or communicating thoughts by speaking."[27] Speech is not merely described as the ability to talk but is recognized as true power, one that can undoubtedly be exerted just as loud on the page. Its strength does not lie in its sheer capacity to verbalize but in that it can actually transcend intangible ideas, thoughts and objects into tangibles – not unlike fiction.

The first manifestations of speech in a child usually happen around the end of the second year or the beginning of the third, which, on top of being the time when pretend play surfaces, also coincides with children's first encounters with stories being read to –

[26] Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992 (1865/71). Print. 163
[27] <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Web.

and understood by – them. Both on the pages and in the house, the voice[28] of the child rises and makes itself heard.[29]

This voice is a particularly rich one, especially when it comes to fiction. Word play, lessons, nonsense, moral or a simple sketch of daily life, the speech that is allotted to the child in literature is vast and multiple. It is versatile and compliant, as are the objects and concepts held within it. Everything is made possible in childhood because nothing is yet set in stone, seems to tell the fictional voice to its readers. Children's literature "appears like a symphony of singular speeches, sociolects or idiolects[30] that allow each speaker to define its relationship to language and to the world," asserts French professor Florence Gaiotti (48). Indeed, the concept of speech in children's literature is profoundly multifaceted, offering dialogues not only among the characters themselves, or between the protagonists and the child reader, but also between the adult reader and the child reader. The textual speech thus becomes a enabling device for the child and the adult to interact and communicate on a deeper level. It calls for a time of reflection on oneself, others and on the world.

If speech is at the core of childhood and its literature, it is indispensable to underline that it has not always been perceived as such a vital instrument. People nowadays tend to remember their childhood with tender feelings. They recall their parents reading to them at bedtime, and probably carry on the habit with their own children. Yet, children's literature is a very modern concept. Indeed, not until the 20th

[28] In this chapter, "voice" will be used figuratively, with the idea that the child protagonist (via the adult author) is trying to give a voice to real-life children, to become the interpretor of said children's emotions and thoughts through fictional speech.
[29] Incidentally, the French word for "child," "enfant," comes from the latin "infans," which means the one who does not speak.
[30] Speech patterns or habits of a particular social group (sociolect) or specific individual (idiolect).

century did it rise as a distinct category in libraries, or a discipline worth studying. The state of being a child, and not merely a small, unfinished adult, is – as was seen in the introduction to this dissertation – an idea that emerged in 18th century Europe when philosophers developed an interest in their childhood, as they reminisced times past and the marks it had left on their adult lives.

The concept of the child was new and redefined constantly. It was nothing like a modern reader would expect, with an emphasis laid on character identification – which was deemed highly unhealthy. Moreover, when it came to literature for children, the reactions were quite ambivalent. Indeed, fiction was considered rather dangerous to the young mind and, as such, welcomed various wary approaches – from being simply ridiculed to being outright forbidden.

In truth there was hardly any fiction written for children in 18th century Europe. Tales from the 17th century (Charles Perrault's in particular) and before were still in use. Yet, the new outlooks on education brought about by Rousseau and Locke – notably the belief that practical experience was key – made these strongly didactical and metaphorical tales less significant. Not to mention the fact that these very stories were starting to be perceived as threatening and confining rather than educational.

Concepts and ways of thinking the child thus evolved, highlighting the importance of the stage of childhood in the grand scheme of life, so that children began to be given a – very small – voice by the end of the century. With philosophers and authors reminiscing their childhood with nostalgia[31], the child started to become a being to be recognized and heard, in real life and fiction alike.

[31] Diderot's definition of the child's speech in the *Encyclopedia* is a fine parallel to the way childhood was perceived – a sweet, carefree time that had to be cherished yet absolutely needed to evolve into something

Naturally, the child's literary speech then was rather elementary, oddly oscillating between the overly saccharine and the repressive. If the child was a person in itself – or the premises of one to come, – he/she still needed to be shaped and educated. Yet, with the 19th century, "children's speech [became] amplified. […] Though looking idealized, this speech partially [became] more autonomous, and not only [appeared] as a space for moralizing conversation but also as a way to revisit and rethink itself, through the variety of uses the characters put it through." (Gaiotti 11) From its very first babbling, children's fictional speech has hence continuously been moving and growing – like its readers – turning from nonsense and fun play by the end of the 19th century to the complex voice it is now, amidst entertainment, education and communication. Children's literature is in constant redefinition and introspection, thus bequeathing the voices within it a greater spectrum of expression.

In 1996, British author Philipp Pullman won the prestigious Carnegie Medal for *The Golden Compass* (first book of *His Dark Materials* trilogy) and declared during his acceptance speech that "there are some themes, some subjects, too large for adult fiction; they can only be dealt with adequately in a children's book. The reason for that is that in adult literary fiction, stories are there on sufferance. Other things are felt to be more

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more elaborate, with time:
« **Parole enfantine**, (*Lang. franç.*) nous appellons au propre *paroles enfantines*, ces demi-mots par lesquels les enfans qui n'ont pas encore l'usage libre de leur langue, expriment leurs pensées. Rien n'est plus joli que de converser avec eux dans ces premieres années où ils commencent à prononcer à moitié plusieurs mots, dont la prononciation imparfaite donne une grace infinie à tous leurs petits discours, *dimidiata verba, dùm tentant integra pronuntiare, loquelam ipso offensantis linguoe fragmine dulciorem, auscultantibus proebent*. Mais ce langage imparfait, ce ton enfantin, cette voix à demi-basse, que quelques jolies femmes affectent d'imiter, est ridicule quand on n'est plus dans cet âge tendre où la nature en faisoit tout le charme. C'est ainsi que les mines dans un âge avancé, sont des grimaces. »
<http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/> (ARTFL Encyclopédie Project). Web.

important: technique, style, literary knowingness."[32] According to Pullman, the essence of children's literature would then be the flexibility of the story or the inner voice of the protagonist, as they tend to be tightly interwoven. What matters is what is said, and not how it is said. Pullman has a point in the sense that children can easily be transported by the tale and that the plot – no matter how thin it may be – is often the most fundamental aspect of children's literature. Nonetheless, the "what is said" knows a variety of "hows" in children's fiction that should not be overlooked. Indeed, children's literature is the realm of puns, imagery dialogues, neologisms, poems, portmanteau, nonsense, etc. and children's speech is as much the language as it is the meaning – both in fiction and real life. Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin believed that "form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon." (1981 259) Far from denying Bakhtin's claim entirely, children's literature nonetheless aims at deconstructing – or at least attempting to dismantle – such a constricting theory by expanding discourse to more than its mere verbal aspect.

If we pay closer attention to the full scope of children's books, the voice given to the literary child seems infinite, actually giving a freedom of expression – to this tight triangle that represent the fictional child, the child reader and the adult author – to be found nowhere else. "Childhood, once a condition of limited autonomy and deferred pleasure ("wait until you're older"), is now a zone of perpetual freedom and delight."[33] Adult writers enjoy the all-possible offered by children's literature – a land seemingly without borders, using entertainment as a way to ponder on grander philosophical

[32] Philipp Pullman's Carnegie Medal Acceptance Speech. 1996. <http://www.randomhouse.com/features/pullman/author/carnegie.php>. Web.
[33] Scott, A.O. "The Death of Adulthood in American Culture." *The New York Times.* Sept. 11th 2014. Web.

questions, such as language or animality, as will be seen later in this dissertation. Children's literature would verily appear to qualify for what Roland Barthes described as « texte de jouissance » (text of bliss), that is a text that "imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, [and] brings to a crisis his relation with language." (1973 25-6)[34]

Indeed, children's literature is a literature that can – and must – reshape itself constantly, thus taking its readers on a ride that often makes them, albeit unconsciously, reinterpret their relation to all these aspects of life and the world described by Barthes; language being at the core of this journey. With children's literature, the « je » (I) invariably tumbles towards the « jeu » (play, game). As Dahl's little heroine reminds us, children do appreciate a good banter:

> "Do you think that all children's books ought to have funny bits in them?" Miss Honey asked.
>
> "I do," Matilda said. "Children are not so serious as grown-ups and they love to laugh." (1988 130-1)

Laughter aids children not only to develop their growing imagination and creativity but also to alleviate the stress of their challenging daily lives by helping them grow a sense of perspective and well-being. As Matilda engages into a deep conversation with Miss Honey on what children's literature should or should not be, humor is also portrayed as a means of making friends, breaking the ice to create bonds born from

[34] English translation: Barthes Roland, *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Miller, Richard. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975. Print. 14

sharing fragments of happiness. As Bert and Uncle Albert sang it in Disney's version of *Mary Poppins*, after sharing a couple of silly jokes: "We love to laugh/Loud and long and clear/We love to laugh/So ev'rybody can hear/The more you laugh/The more you fill with glee/And the more the glee/The more we're a merrier we!"[35] Laughter means sharing a bond, something that stems naturally from the connection language provides between subjects. The humorous language present in children's literature is also often a way to trigger more communication. Take Roald Dahl's *The BFG* story for example. As Sophie and the Big Friendly Giant are trying to concoct a plan to capture evil, human-eating giants, the young girl's tall friend tells her: "Every night they is yelling at me as they go bootling past. The other day they was yelling "We is off to Mrs Sippi and Miss Souri to guzzle them both!" " (115-6). After the adult, who may be reading the novel out loud to children, engages in the obligatory fits of laughter, said adult might engage in a sort of paratextual explanation of how 'Mrs Sippi' and 'Miss Souri' are actually standing for the North American States of Mississippi and Missouri, thus revealing the plurality of experiences speech pertains to. Dahl brings a game to his text that goes beyond the written words.

In *The Language and Thought of the Child*, Jean Piaget comes to the conclusion – with the help of several study cases – that "there are strong conjectures towards the idea that the child's primitive language might fulfill functions much more complex than might seem at first glance." (15) Despite the slight condescension of Piaget's phrasing, the truth of the statement remains. Children's speech is intricate and layered; it serves many a purpose, from entertainment to learning. If people tend to pay more attention to the

[35] Mary Poppins. Dir. Stevenson, Robert. Walt Disney Studios, 2013 (1964). DVD.

educational and pedagogical dimension of speech in children's literature, it is capital to acknowledge the crucial role humor also plays in it.

Humor is a predominant feature of children's literature. Offering comic relief to balance tense situations, taming fears, entertaining or encouraging rule-breaking, humor knows as many variations in children's literature as it does in grown-up literature, if not more, and is truly loved by its audience. Nonsense, neologisms, parody, riddles, farce, black humor, wit, gags, repetitions, caricatures, puns, tomfoolery, text/image discrepancy, etc.; children's literature actually overflows with exposure to the comic. It bears a veritable taste for language and revels in its endless morphing.

The comic displayed in children's literature can be fairly refined, especially given the fact that it is the creation of a grown-up writer. Yet, its target audience is often described as being quite naïve and straightforward: "In a book for children you can't put the plot on hold while you cut artistic capers for the amusement of your sophisticated readers, because, thank God, your readers are not sophisticated. They've got more important things in mind than your dazzling skill with wordplay. They want to know what happens next," says Pullman. (1996) Therefore one may wonder: can the child, a being ofttimes so gullible when it comes to tales, – "Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast," as the White Queen would tell Alice is a proper thing to engage in (Carroll 153) – exert the necessary distance to fully indulge in a humor offered to him/her by that outsider that is the adult? How do these external authors know what the child will find amusing or relatable? And does the child truly do so?

Indeed, children's literature is intended to be the spokesperson of this voice of the

child but what credit should it be given when we know that none other than an adult is hiding behind it? The child protagonist – emblem of the child – is a true fiction in itself, unable to express itself without the voice of the adult author. Speech is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "an agency by which a point of view is expressed or represented;" however the agent behind that voice is not the person it represents, when it comes to children's literature, which creates a paradox. Where does the driving force behind the power of the child's literary speech reside?

Language is an undeniably powerful tool in children's literature. Amidst education and playfulness, speech is the key element of the reader's adherence to the story and its characters. Often narrated in the first person singular or from the point of view of the child protagonist, as will be examined in this chapter, speech is the scepter of belief in the created patterns but whose speech is it really? Since the voice of the child is given to him/her by another – who is completely alienated from his/her condition (authors, anthropologists, psychologists, parents and teachers alike) – is it rightly his/her? Or even remotely accurate? Do children truly believe in the speech that someone else assigned to them? Can they actually even do so?

Children's literature, being this contradictory fabrication of one group for another who could not be more distinct, actively questions the powers and shortcomings of language. It simultaneously explores the full spectrum of children's speech and challenges both the possibilities and the confinements of the very idea of the "voice."

Aimed at children but written by adults, intertwining the visual with the verbal,

often offering a double entendre to entertain parents along with their offspring, and using words at it sees fit, children's literature is a completely hybrid and malleable genre.

The first occurrences of the child's literary speech being something other than merely educational were found in 19th century British literature with the now canonic *Alice* books and Edward Lear's limericks:

There was an Old Man with a beard,
Who said, "It is just as I feared! –
Two Owls and a Hen, four Larks and Wren,
Have all built their nests in my beard. (Lear 79)

The whimsical illustration and obvious love of words serve here to motivate the reader into pondering the relation between the language of text and that of the image. Nonsensical humor mainly relies on the discrepancy between language and perceptions. The echoing sounds call the child into comparing the words with their illustration, playing with the variations, repeating the text while counting the animals nestled in that poor man's beard, delighting in the absurdity of it all, never realizing how much there is to learn from so-called nonsense (such as numbers, syllables and rhythm in this particular limerick). In *Books, Children and Men*, French historian Paul Hazard wrote that "we laugh for some profound reason of which we are hardly conscious, but which takes shape in our mind. The idea is caricatured, but is not completely false. On the contrary, it

touches us by the element of truth that it contains." (1949 182)[36] This definition of laughter and its signification is a rough but accurate sketch of what Lear and Carroll had in mind when toying with language in their writings. They used the freedom of play granted by nonsense not to go against sense but to call to the randomness of the given sense and to create new patterns of understanding.

With their delectable nonsense and neologisms, both Carroll and Lear created a whole new – dare I say "frabjous"?[37] – playground for children's literature to blossom in. With the birth of this new dimension, children's literature became for its young readers what British pediatrician and psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott would later call a *potential space*[38], offering a safe environment, propitious to the dawning of a two-way experience between the significant and the imaginary.

> The idea of linguistic nonsense takes hold as a force in children's literature in the mid-nineteenth century and never seems to let go. True, there had always been baby talk. Parents must have "goo-ed" and "gaa-ed" at their children for millennia. Lullabies and nursery rhymes hinge on repeated nonsense syllables. But the idea of nonsense as a force of the imagination, of nonsense as a challenge to the logic of adulthood and the laws of civil life – this was a new idea in Victorian England. (Lerer 191)

[36] Translated by Marguerite Mitchell. Hazard, Paul. *Books, Children and Men*. Boston: The Horn Book, 1944. Print. 140

[37] Frabjous: portmanteau word meaning delightful, wonderful, or fabulous; most likely a combination of the words fair and joyous. Lewis Carroll first coined this term in "The Jabberwocky," a poem read by Alice in *Through the Looking-Glass*: "O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!" (118)

[38] The *potential space* is a postulate developed by Winnicott stating that between a baby and a mother exists a space of trust that will become the cornerstone of playing. He then went on to apply it to a larger scale, which proves relevant to the area of children's literature: "the place where cultural experience is located is in the *potential space* between the individual and the environment (originally the object). The same can be said of playing. Cultural experience begins with creative living first manifested in play." (1971 100)

In truth, linguistic nonsense never did let go, as claimed American scholar Seth Lerer. It is now commonly found in children's literature internationally and tends to be at the center of the French stage when it comes to picture books for the beginner reader. "Language does not provide us with a picture of reality, but with the tools needed to grasp and manipulate reality to our own purposes,"[39] believed British philosopher Jeremy Bentham. Language does not supply us with a set image of how or what things are but gives us the possibility to create new patterns of reality, different ways to connect the dots – so to speak – and paint an ampler array of images. As such, language reflects the idea of the infinite. It is this very idea that authors of children's literature have been known to emulate in their work, the ever-changing world of such an elusive fiction being the perfect playfield for them to experiment with.

Lewis Carroll once stated in an article on drama entitled "The Stage and the Spirit of Reverence" that "no word has a meaning *inseparably* attached to it; a word means what the speaker intends by it, and what the hearer understands by it, and that is all." (1899 183) As such, nonsensicality and language play are not purely aesthetic and devoid of meaning but on the contrary lead to the creation of new sense. They tease children's affinity with sounds to better show the complexity and depth of their fictional speech. In truth, they can be a way to express what cannot be said with common language.

Word play comes to compensate the deficiency encountered with regular speech. Speech not only conveys but it can also create – and sometimes destroy. The voice of the child – whether it is real or fictional – inevitably possesses this potent tool of life and

[39] Postema, Gerald. "Facts, Fictions and Law: Bentham on the Foundations of Evidence." *Facts in Law*. Ed. W. Twining. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1983. Print. xxxvii, describing Bentham's views.

death over objects and ideas. Teddies come to life when named and vegetables and other unpleasant things can cease to exist when one refuses to acknowledge them. Engaging in make-believe play with my – then 3 year-old – nephew once birthed a very interesting conversation. We were playing 'wolf' ("jouer au loup"), which is basically pretending that there is a big bad wolf out to eat us and that we should try to be quiet and hide from it, while still approaching the imaginary beast as close as possible to get a peep – for the thrill of it, naturally. Thinking that my nephew would enjoy a thorough act on my part, I was devoting myself to the shivers and wide-open eyes of my pretend fear, when a worried looking 3 year-old interrupted me: "mais non, t'inquiète pas, j'suis là moi, c'est juste pour jouer, pas pour de vrai;" only to keep going as if the game had known no recess: "regarde, il est caché, il est là derrière le canapé, chuuuut, il arrive."[40] The fact that the make-believe was purely verbal is quite interesting in itself but what really excited my curiosity was the bending of the game to fit the situation. If I looked too genuinely scared then the wolf simply vanished from existence, but as soon as my nephew felt I was reassured enough in my pretence, the playing and the wolf were back on, just from the switch in his lexicon. No need to enunciate rules or state that we should get back to playing wolf. Instead, just a simple interweaving of speeches, as if his voice allowed the two planes of reality and imaginary to coexist naturally.

Not only does the way children maneuver words give life to multiple dimensions, it also produces the opportunity to call into question the value of the linguistic sign, echoing the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified previously established by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Children's literature fully exploits the arbitrary

[40] "don't worry, I'm here, we're just playing, it's not for real" / "look, it's hidden, it's here, behind the sofa, shhhhhh, it's coming"

nature of the linguistic sign and the ever-changing disposition of children's speech. Fiction for the young constantly challenges the acquired (that is, nurture, as opposed to nature) value and validity of language. Carroll's *Alice* books, and to a lesser extent Pascal Garnier's *Dico Dingo,* are the perfect examples of such an inquiry.

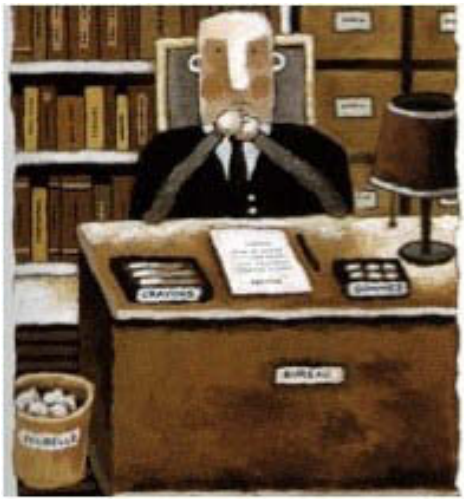
The "Mad Tea-Party" chapter in *Alice in Wonderland* could be the epitome of the nonsense of life and language and yet seems to reveal something deeper, questioning the very idea of expression and why we partake in it.

> "[Y]ou should say what you mean," the March Hare went on.
>
> "I do," Alice hastily replied; "at least – at least I mean what I say – that's the same thing, you know."
>
> "Not the same thing a bit!" said the Hatter. "You might just as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see'!"
>
> "You might just as well say," added the March Hare, "that 'I like what I get' is the same thing as 'I get what I like'!"
>
> "You might just as well say," added the Dormouse, who seemed to be talking in his sleep, "that 'I breathe when I sleep' is the same thing as 'I sleep when I breathe'!" (55)

This little dialogue strikes the readers and calls out to them to rethink their interaction with language, as well as the way they experience reality and fiction. If indeed saying and meaning can be two different things, what exactly constitutes the essence of saying? Is it aesthetic, literal or composed of many brushstrokes forming a larger picture? Carroll seems to draw the reader's attention to the act of creation that speech implies,

when usually, just like Alice, we merely unconsciously take words for granted and tend to remain on the surface of the looking-glass, instead of truly seeing through it. What Carroll tries to convey is that language is not merely a means of creating reality but also a way to test and confront this reality. Language, even in its most nonsensical attributes, is not as simple as it may seem, but holds a variety of meanings, depending on context, reception and intention. It should therefore urge readers to ponder its substance and potency. "A nonsense text […]," French professor Jean-Jacques Lecercle points out, "plays with the bounds of common sense in order to remain within the view of them, even if it has crossed to the other side of the frontier; but it does not seek to limit the text's meaning to one single interpretation – on the contrary, its dissolution of sense multiplies meaning. This is because nonsense text requires to be read on two levels at once – two incompatible levels." (20)

Dico Dingo, a French novel with a target age of seven years and above – meaning an audience of freshly autonomous readers – tells the story of "petit Robert" – yes, like



the French dictionary, pun intended – whose parents are obsessed with order, cleanliness and making sure that each thing knows (and remains in) its proper place. Mr. and Mrs. Robert neatly label every object, from coffee beans to the trashcan. (9) And since it is quite hard to figure out what to put under the 'S' label in the kitchen, Mrs. Robert has, quite fairly, decided that neither **s**alt nor **s**ugar should be allowed in the house; no place for chaos. (10)

The main problem is that little Robert Robert – a very practical and tidy name – is far from being the model child his parents wish him to be. Indeed, young Robert loves nothing better than to play and leave his toys scattered, as well as his clothes – the little rascal. It would break his parents' hearts, really – well, if such displays of emotions were not so messy, of course.

One day, as was ›und to happen to such a disorderly child, ittle Robert was perched on top of his father's big dictionary, on top of a chair, trying to grab his little trunk full of treasured junk on top of the wardrobe, and fell, dropping the dictionary full of words, spilling them all over the place. (15) Little Robert strives to stuff them back inside the best he can but naturally they do not end up in their rightful place and a few mischievous ones even stay out.

What ensues is that dreaded chaos of words jumbled together and meanings set adrift. Language becomes almost mechanical, reduced to science or technology, and loses its substance in favor of its technicalities. The couple coming over for dinner is the Azertyuiop, a nod to the placement of letters on a French keyboard, and are described with references to fonts and computer-assisted writing:

> M. Azertyuiop est un collègue du père de Robert. Il est très grand,

très maigre, très noir, avec une petite tête ronde juchée au-dessus de ses épaules comme un point sur un "I." C'est tout le contraire de sa femme, aussi ronde qu'un "O" majuscule en caractère gras.

Avec eux, pas un mot plus haut que l'autre, il faut parler tout bas, comme à l'église. (16/18)[41]

The comparison drawn between letter shapes and the physical aspects of the characters is made even funnier because of its incongruity. By highlighting parts of speech, such as letters, Pascal Garnier calls the young reader's attention to the correlation between words, or even letters, and the mental images that we associate with them. It can sometimes be purely random, like the couple's last name, Azertyuiop – a clear reminder of high technology and the seemingly senseless calculations that lay behind it, or inspired by the visions that shapes form in our minds, the way the letters – tall, angular 'i' and round, thick 'O' – will invariably make us visualize a skinny and awkwardly tall man accompanied by his short and chubby wife. And in the pun « pas un mot plus haut que l'autre » (never a word higher than the other, both literally, as in equal in sizes, and figuratively, to express that one should not raise one's voice around them) resides a slight Carrollian discrepancy of nonsense, as the guests are described as letters of very different shapes (also visible in the illustration) when the text tells the reader that in the Azertyuiop

[41] Mr. Azertyuiop was a colleague of Robert's father. He is really tall, really skinny, really dark, with a small round head perched on top of his shoulders like the dot on an "I." His wife is the exact opposite, as round as a bold, capital "O." With them, there is never a word higher than the other, one has to speak in a low voice, the way one does in church."

family everything has to be even and leveled.

The use of puns and of the way mental images are born from text is not only a means of entertaining the readers but also of questioning them. Indeed, what would speech be without the human involvement, seems to ask *Dico Dingo*.

As the story proceeds, the friendly dinner turns into the wrathful fifth circle of Dante's Inferno. The guests leave, people on TV are affected, the virus spreads to the entire world, circulation is interrupted and his parents cannot seem to stop fighting and gibbering, each spoken word coming out more outlandish than the previous one: "- Arlette, c'est ta confiote ! Elle est encore plus tamponnée de la fiche que d'habitude, elle croyait que je bassinais l'épagneul ! [...] Zut ! J'ai oublié de garer le potiron dans l'igloo." (28/30)[42]; which would roughly translate in regular speech as "- Arlette, it's your mother! She's even crazier than usual, she thought I was [no clue whatsoever]! Damn! I forgot to park the car in the garage," yet the interpretation of such nonsense is intentionally left open for better comic effect. Garnier juggles words and allows the more improbable to meet and create anew. The topsy-turvy world of muddled words triggers in little Robert the need to come clean to his parents – "Tant pis pour les cadeaux de Noël, les punitions à venir, il y va du sort de l'humanité" (35)[43] – and to engage in an in-depth problem-solving reflection. The world of children is one of endless possibilities, and while that is a synonym of wondrous adventures and free rein, it also encompasses responsibilities. Indeed, as the child protagonist indulges in the liberty granted by the malleability of language, said child has to grow as he faces the consequences of his actions. There is

[42] "- Arlette, it's your jam! She's even more rammed in the poster than usual, she thought I was bathing the spaniel! […] Damn! I forgot to park the pumpkin in the igloo."
[43] "So much for Christmas presents, punishments to come, this is a matter of the fate of humanity."

learning in all playing, no matter how ungoverned. When little Robert realizes that he does not wish to create car accidents and violent fights, he must disentangle the new patterns and clean up the mess. It does sound childish in its teachings, yet it proves an interesting exercise of language elasticity and of testing the boundaries of humor. How far into these endless possibilities granted by childhood, or the world of children's literature, can one go before it stops being all in good fun? Through language tryouts and fumbling, authors of children's literature can better render the child's mind throughout its construction process.

"On a purely narratological level, nonsense is a free play of words, narratives, styles and events." (Khasawneh 14) The disruption of language experienced by little Robert in *Dico Dingo* is mostly articulated for comic effect and playful learning, yet this type of lexical turmoil can also be a means of expressing deeper implications, such as the emotional unbalance of the fictional child. Language malleability might actually be a way to overcome fear and difficult situations, as we can see when Matéo reshapes words in Audren's *Les Mots Maléfiques*. As was evoked earlier, the child's speech can hold a power of life and death over things. When young Matéo decides to rid his world of the syllable MA, after his mother falls ill, "**ma**lade" in the original French, a tale of death and rebirth takes place:

> Ma maman est tombée malade un mardi matin du mois de mars. Ce jour-là, j'ai compris que tous les mots qui commençaient par « ma » me portaient malheur.
>
> Depuis, je ne marche plus, je cours. Je n'entre plus dans les magasins, j'attends dehors, et je n'écoute plus les cours de maths de la

> maîtresse. J'ai même jeté à la poubelle un paquet tout neuf de marshmallows. (9)[44]

The child protagonist gets to experience this redefinition first hand, as he takes to erasing his life as Matéo in order to become brand new Harry – in a clear reference to Rowling's infamous character, Harry Potter: "Le plus difficile a été de convaincre mes amis de ne plus m'appeler Matéo. À la place, j'ai choisi Harry. J'aimerais tellement devenir sorcier et guérir Maman. Sorcier mais surtout pas magicien !"[45] (13) – in a world void of disease (maladie), evil (maléfique), pain (malheur), maths and even macaronis. The complex reasoning of the child in the face of emotional pain and fear is addressed from a linguistic perspective. Matéo's worries are translated through his interaction with words, and affect those around him:

> J'ai peur qu'elle passe toute sa vie à l'hôpital, peur qu'elle ne revienne jamais, peur qu'elle ne meure. Peut-être que, si elle ne s'appelait plus Maman, elle guérirait plus vite ?
>
> Désormais, je l'appelle donc Lila. C'est son vrai prénom. Un prénom pas du tout maléfique.
>
> Pourtant, cet après-midi, en quittant sa chambre d'hôpital, lorsque je lui ai dit : « Au revoir, Lila ! », elle s'est mise à pleurer. Avec des yeux tout rouges et tout perdus, elle a regardé Papa et, de sa voix fatiguée, elle

[44] "My **mommy** fell **ill** on a **Tuesday morning** of the month of **March**. That day, I understood that all the words that started with "ma" brought **misfortune**. Since then, I do not **walk** anymore, I run. I no longer enter **stores** but wait outside, and I no longer listen to the **teacher**'s **math** lessons. I even threw away a brand new bag of **marshmallows**." All words in bold start with "ma" in French.

[45] "The hardest thing has been to convince my friends not to call me Matéo. Instead, I chose Harry. I would so love to become a wizard and heal **Mommy**. A wizard but not a **magician**!"

lui a confié :

– Tu vois, je ne suis même plus sa maman… (15-17)[46]

There is an extreme violence in Matéo's words, although it originates from fear. Audren here reminds the readers that the child is no stranger to dark thoughts or pain. The effect of the young protagonist's words is extremely powerful in its harshness. Their brutality betrays the sense of rejection felt by Matéo that he is left to deal with his mother's illness. In his mind, the solution rests upon him. He believes that if he does not act with such coldness and detachment, his mother will not be able to heal. This causes a deep fracture in the family's dynamics, turning the child into the responsible one when the adult is now vulnerable both physically and mentally. The effect on the reader is just as powerful as the character's words, shocking and leading to a questioning of one's reactions in the face of helplessness, not to forget that it might also set in motion a reflection on the power of language to affect our surroundings, not only with the naming of objects but with the influence it can have on the people with whom we interact. As harsh a lesson as it might seem for a target audience of seven to ten year-old children, the precise violence of it is what makes the message of the story so effective. The cruelty enclosed in the young protagonist's words acts as a catalyst, both allowing him to voice his fears and the readers to decipher the complexity of language and emotions. Matéo's emotional distress is here reflected in the disturbance experienced by his speech and the secrecy of his redefined lexicon. Indeed, if he gets his father to call him Harry not to

[46] "I am scared that she might spend all her life in the hospital, scared that she might never come back, scared that she might die. Maybe, if I did not call her **Mommy**, she would heal faster? / From now on, I call her Lila, then. It's her real name. A name not **evil** at all. / Yet, this afternoon, when I left her hospital room, I told her: "Goodbye, Lila!", she started crying. With lost, red eyes, she looked at Daddy and, with her tired voice, confided to him:/-See, I'm not even his **mommy** anymore..."

upset him, he refuses to explain his reasoning to anyone, keeping his new lexicon to himself like a sacred talisman. “Mes idées rebondissent partout dans ma tête. Je ne sais plus penser droit. [...] Mon cœur bat très fort. J'ai peur d'avouer ma peur. Et puis, même si je l'appelle Lila, quand je pense à Maman, quand je parle de Maman, de gros sanglots se coincent au fond de ma gorge comme des vagues qu'on empêcherait de s'échouer sur la plage.” (25-6)[47] In his new speech, Matéo alone can decide to rid the world of all evils and detain the knowledge that he is doing so. This way, his reconstructed speech pattern offers him an opportunity to transform his vulnerability and helplessness into complete, powerful omnipotence. Audren’s character becomes a sort of all-knowing leader in a world full of frail ignorant followers unaware of the sacrifices and straining work he now operates daily. His crippled speech becomes authoritative and is a source of control, despite his own awareness that it does not take away the pain. Thus the young reader might be able to feel through the character’s pain without being overwhelmed by it – at least that is what is didactically expected. There is a detachment along with the brutal force of Matéo’s speech pattern that allows the audience of the book to put things into perspective and think back on their own troubles and pain. The importance of recognizing and overcoming one’s fears is something that affects everyone, fictional characters or not. As Matéo’s mother recovers and finally comes home by the end of the novel, the tension is diffused back into humor, as the young protagonist expresses his relief by uttering an absurd succession of all his previously revoked words, to which participate his parents – without ever being private to the reason behind such an odd behavior: “- Marteau !

[47] “My ideas bounce all over my head. I no longer know how to think straight. [...] My heart is beating fast. I am afraid of admitting my fear. Also, even though I call her Lila, when I think about Mommy, when I talk about Mommy, big sobs get stuck at the back of my throat, like waves someone was preventing from washing up on shore.”

Magasin ! Macédoine de légumes ! Machine ! Masque ! Matelas ! ... / Mes parents pensent qu'il s'agit d'un nouveau jeu et, tout en riant, ils répondent chacun leur tour: / - Massue ! / - Mascarpone ! / - Manie ! / - Majuscule ! / C'est magnifique !" (36)[48] Through comic relief, laughter is presented as a mechanism that makes the unacceptable acceptable. The words that had been banished as evil and hurtful can now heal and liberate. The power and meaning of words are none but those we infuse them with.

Creating new patterns of speech can also simply be for the sake of fun, whether that may be with homophones in Pef's *La Belle lisse poire du prince de Motordu*, or alliterations in Jacques Roubaud's *Animaux* poems.[49] Humor encourages the rise of a speech that the young reader might find more relatable and appealing than so-called "proper" dialect. Children tend to bend words to their needs and seeing a fictional character do the same might propel them into questioning language as an institution and developing a sharper – more critical – perspective on their surroundings. "The fumbling and incompleteness allow a better rendering of a mind in the process of building itself, through a speech just as hesitant. The inner monologue therefore displays a desire for "psychological truth" while trying to restore as closely as possible the wavering of one's thoughts through language." (Gaiotti 120) Being rid of language conventions, the reader feels liberated and empowered. The use of speech in children's literature is often less about instilling grammar accuracy or expanding vocabulary than it is about reflecting the

[48] "**- Hammer**! **Store**! **Diced** mixed vegetables! **Machine**! **Mask**! **Mattress**! ... / My parents think it's a new game and, laughing, they take turn to reply: / **- Club**! / **- Mascarpone**! / **- Habit**! / **- Capital** word! / It's **wonderful**!"

[49] This extract from one of Roubaud's nonsensical *Animaux de tout le monde* poems, *The Armadillo*, exemplifies to perfection the playful character with which he uses consonants – which the reader can delectability feel rolling off the tongue, even when reading in one's mind: « […] / le tatou tâte sa tatin / on joue tati à la télé / tatum au juke-box, ô tatou / t'as tout l'air d'un tatou, t'as tout : / tétous, tutti, tout ! t'as ton teint / t'es tatoué, mais, tatou, que t'es laid ! » (61)

child reader's thinking process and heightening his or her power of imagination.

Children's literature reflects on the needs kids wish to satisfy when they talk. Pef's novel, *La Belle lisse poire du Prince de Motordu*,[50] expresses freedom and a detachment from conventions through his character's bended speech. Pef plays on homophones in order to display his character's flaw in an endearing manner. The Prince wears a 'chateau' (castle) atop his head and lives in a 'chapeau' (hat) where he enjoys meals of 'boulet rôti' (roasted cannonball, for roasted chicken – 'poulet'), 'pattes fraîches' (fresh legs, for fresh pasta – 'pâtes') and 'braises du jardin' (garden's embers, for garden's strawberries – 'fraises') in his 'salle à danger' (danger room, instead of the more conventional 'salle à manger,' that is dining room). (9/12-3)

The laughable twisted nature of his vocabulary serves the purpose of telling young readers that they may imagine and create anything they set their minds to and that being different should be treasured, not fixed. Indeed, the Prince in Pef's story is not in

[50] *The Beautiful Smooth Pear of the Prince of Twistedword* – which, in the original French, sounds close the "beautiful story of the Prince of twisted word."

the least incapacitated by his impaired speech. On the contrary it makes him reign as master over his own destiny, even winning over the heart and vocabulary of the pretty princess Dézécolle, the schoolteacher, after she takes it upon herself to corrects his deficiencies. The fact that the prince can be loved by the schoolteacher, and actually even bend her speech in the process, – "Un soir, la princesse dit à son mari: / - Je voudrais des enfants. / - Combien? demanda le prince qui était en train de passer l'aspirateur. / - Beaucoup, répondit la princesse, plein de petits glaçons et de petites billes. / Le prince la regarda avec étonnement, puis il éclata de rire." (36-8)[51] – incites children readers to play around with their own speech in order to find their voice and figure out the power it gives them – without concealing the evidence that sometimes words might be lacking to express one's true thoughts. Here, Pef tries to convey the idea that school might not be the ultimate answer to all that children need and that having the experience of speaking is just as much about the inner input as it is about the outside learning. Knowing and developing one's voice is expressing one's uniqueness and individualism. While a proper enough speech is necessary to be able to communicate and be understood in the world, absolute conformity is not and individuality should be nourished and nurtured. The story offers its readers "a perilous and unsettling experience that, through the diversity of speeches and the shortcomings of the narrative voice, invites [them] to test the powers of [their] speech, to truly speak." (Gaiotti 143)

Pef's story offers a pleasant counterpoint to Piaget's prior refusal to acknowledge the use of fantasy in favor of factual reasoning. Indeed, when retelling his interaction

[51] "One night, the princess told her husband: / - I would like to have kids. / - How many? the prince asked while vacuuming. / - A lot, the princess answered, lots of little ice cubes (the French word 'glaçons' sounds close to 'garçons', that is 'boys') and marbles ('billes' for 'filles', 'girls'). / The prince stared at her in astonishment, then burst out laughing."

with his young daughter Jacqueline in *La Formation du symbole chez l'enfant*[52], Piaget preferred to relegate as a joke the child's affirmation that, yes, elephants do have wings as she has seen some fly in the past: "J. often fantasizes with no other purpose than to contradict or to combine ideas as she pleases, with no interest in what she professes but only in the combination itself, such as: "These are wings, right (the ear of an elephant)? – No. Elephants don't fly. – Yes, they do. I've seen some. – It's a joke. – No, it's not a joke. It's true. I've seen some."" (126) Had he not been so quick to dismiss it, Piaget might have found the nonsensical idea to hold some truth within the child's mind. As Bettelheim elaborated years later, this is what should have followed: "where [did] the elephant [need] to fly in such a hurry, or what dangers [was she] trying to escape from"? (119) Through her fanciful depiction of elephants, Jacqueline might actually have tried to express more serious implications, the only way she was able to process them. Asking follow-up questions, without showing judgment over the nonsensical – the way Pef's Prince incites his readers to do – may have encouraged Piaget's little girl to reveal anything from school bullying and a desire to run away to a simple inclination for exploration.

> If Piaget had engaged in [deeper] conversation […], the issues which the child was grappling with might have emerged, because Piaget would have shown his willingness to accept her method of exploring the problem. But Piaget was trying to understand how this child's mind worked on the basis of his rational frame of reference, while the girl was trying to understand the world on the basis of her understanding: through

[52] English translation by Gattegno and Hodgson in Piaget, Jean. *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood.* Routledge: Oxford, 1951 (1945). Print. 118

fantasy elaboration of reality as *she* saw it. (Bettelheim 119-20)

Such nonsense can actually bridge the gap between the child's speech and adults, offering the latter a window into the young mind's way of processing information and emotion. Literality comes second to the way the "force of the imagination of childhood […] illuminate[s] reality." (Natov 318) Or, as Dahl's Big Friendly Giant would put it: "Meanings is not important, […] I cannot be right all the rime. Quite often I is left instead or right." (34) Fantasy and fiction can help children reflect upon their reality, letting them test the malleability and limits of definitions, objects and speech. Children are given the opportunity to use literature as a way to channel such questions through the plethora of voices they encounter in their reading. Speaking – much like reading – is experiencing oneself and the Other. Children's fiction hands its readers the keys to self-discovery, as well as to their integration into society. In its seemingly oversimplified manner, children's literature actually portrays rather fairly "the inner stratification of language, the diversity of social speech and the divergence of the individual voices that resonate in it." (Bakhtin 1978 96) It uses play on words and neologism as a method of putting language to the test and, as such, shows as much maturity and depth as its older counterpart.

> "Nonsense [in children's literature] is more than play, it takes us to the limits of expansion. At times, we hear it in the babble of the infant or the verses of the undergraduates. But at times, too, we may hear it on occasions that remind us that childhood remains a time for longing – when we find ourselves on queer streets or Diagon Alleys, when our boats take us not to where the wild things are, but to where the sidewalk ends,"

supplements Seth Lerer (208). It is undeniable that children's literature navigates a world of potentiality, both in the sense of the infinite possible it offers and in its having potential: the power to embark the readers on journeys and make them questions their assertions. Yet, this lingering presence of longing and nostalgia, which always seem to permeate children's fiction – or even mere mentions of it – is most perplexing as it sometimes seems to hinder the messages it holds.

Chapter 3:

The "child within," or the question of the author's credibility

C.S. Lewis, well-known author of children and young adult fiction, once wrote "We must write for children out of those elements in our own imagination which we share with children." (514) This yearning to be close to the children they target in their works is a common discourse amongst authors of children's literature. The latter is actually a fiction in itself, since it is a genre that has been invented by one age group for the education and entertainment of another. Children's literature, much like childhood, is a construction (social, cultural and narrative) emanating from the mind of adults; grown-ups that are either trying to reminisce what it felt like to be a child, or are simply indulging fully in the free reign given by a genre that not only allows imagination to run free but also whose target audience is highly unlikely to protest or reject as inaccurate, given their age and status. "It is a genre that floats between two ages, often without really belonging to either. A child, reading it, might often learn more about an adult's re-creation of childhood than about the often hard-edged thing he or she knows." (Manlove 10)

Children have neither decision-making power nor examination right over what is written for or about them. The idea of children's literature is indeed paradoxical; it aims at providing a voice to children while asking them to believe in a speech given to them by an outsider who often depicts childhood as a separate entity, or long forgotten imaginary shore one has to reconnect with to be able to write for children. This idea that children are

separated from the rest of the population is not a recent belief but is actually deeply tied in with the very emergence of the concept of childhood itself. In a book entitled *Researching Children's Experiences*, American scholars Freeman and Mathison explain: "Early in the 19th century, Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852) invented kindergarten, the first institution to capture the notion of child centeredness. Although Locke's, Rousseau's, and Froebel's views of childhood and children differed, they all saw children as fundamentally different from adults." (2-3) This idea that children evolve in an entirely different sphere than grown-ups is still as widespread today. Anthropologist Veena Das came to the conclusion after her fieldwork experience with Punjabi families and a community of the Siglikar caste in Delhi, India, that "children create social worlds of their own which are impenetrable to adults." (291) As for writer James M. Barrie, his conviction that if we undoubtedly all did have a Neverland of our own, it is no longer a place we can travel to as adults, inspires the same sentiment of a disjointed world of childhood: "On these magic shores children at play are for ever beaching their coracles. We too have been there; we can still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more." (14)

How is it then that adults are able to write for children if they believe that their audience could not be farther and more foreign; if the realm of childhood is so hermetic and unreachable? Authors of children's books, when giving interviews, will often talk about the "child in them" as an inspiration and way to reconnect with that lost world of childhood. "Toutes les grandes personnes ont d'abord été des enfants. (Mais peu d'entre elles s'en souviennent.)" wrote Antoine de Saint-Exupéry in the *Little Prince*'s dedication

he made to the little boy that once was Leon Werth. (v)[53] In this seemingly innocent sentence lies Saint-Exupéry's confidence that he is one of these select few who can remember and is therefore the most adept person to write stories for children. Authors' claims to have kept a fragment of their childhood, or to be in contact with what they call their "inner child," set them apart and grant their writings a self-endowed credibility.

The assumption held that fiction created by adults for children gives a mirror image of – or an insight on – life may not obtain for children's literature; indeed, if there is a vast spectrum of works on children as protagonists, very little has yet been written regarding the adherence of actual children to the self image presented in the literature that targets them. In this case, children's literature and their protagonists seem more like "a mere image of an image," (Sell 160) rather than a fair reflection of the state of life of their particular age group. What we see in a child's book as we open it is actually a fictional image of a child, coming yet from another image of children, one that is born out of an adult's mind. The fictional child thus seems to be a multi-layered construction.

The question of belief and trust is therefore raised for, indeed, what authority is granted to the author? Can children truly relate to this constructed reflection of themselves? Do they? And is the portrait of childhood sketched in children's fiction even remotely close to its real counterpart?

In the world of children's literature, as well as in childhood, "a cosmic urge to come alive seems operative everywhere. […] Even in the rough surfaces of a wall or in blobs of ink, the child can recognize faces of the polymorphous universe incarnating. […]

[53] "All grown-ups were children first. (But very few of them remember it.)"

In this sense, the child is never alone in the world: a companion – or companions who come in thousands of shapes and forms – emerges out of the cosmos and incarnates." (Griswold 116-21) There is in childhood the capacity to breathe life into insentient things. Dolls and toys come alive fully formed with voices, tastes, feelings and moods under the child's fingers. Griswold explains that though there is a "way of thinking peculiar to childhood [it is] not an unfamiliar one." He argues that many adults can still remember how they used to check upon their toys in the morning to see if they had moved during the night, while they were not looking. The toys are thus given a will of their own, beyond mere human resemblance and characteristics.

However, this argument is also given from the perspective of the adult, giving a difficult grasp to the idea of a world of childhood. This is the main problem encountered regarding the study of childhood and children's media. Indeed, ethnographers, anthropologists, authors but also the everyday person, all regard childhood from an external standpoint. All of them do consider childhood to be a separate stage in life and a separate world altogether; but then how trustworthy can their accounts of it be since they are not part of what they discuss? Ethnographers and anthropologists base their discourse on observation, while authors claim to rely on memory and the child within them. Is the world of childhood that they build in their works a reflection of the observations of childhood encountered in ethnography, considering that they are based upon entirely opposite factors?

First, how is children's literature created? According to Jerry Griswold, five key points, embodying childhood itself, must be found in its literature:

> snugness (children like to play underneath tables or make tents from blankets and chairs), scariness (From the very earliest age, when adults play the game of "Boo!" with infants, the young learn the surprising fact that scariness can be discomforting fun. The world of Children's Literature is not the sunny and trouble-free place that grown-ups often remember it to be. Instead, it is a frightening realm where witches lure children, a wolf chats up Little Red Riding Hood, Mr. McGregor hunts Peter Rabbit, Max encounters the Wild Things, and Voldemort stalks Harry Potter.), smallness (fascination for the tiny), lightness (kids, compared to adults, seem light-hearted and lithe. One of the unique features of Children's Literature is that airborne characters – from Peter Pan to Mary Poppins – abound.), aliveness (talking animals, living toys, and animations of nature. For the young, the whole universe is alive and full of companions). (1-3)

Children's literature thus would seem to provide an especially good place to study the concept of childhood itself, as well as children's look upon the world. From *bildungsroman* to nonsense, the universe of children's literature is vast and multifaceted.

In many a story the child protagonist will depart from home to go on adventures and finally head back once he/she has understood the value of a treasured home. This pattern has become a cognitive model in children's literature and knows numerous variations. It is also used in reverse with stories of childhoods disrupted by war, poverty, or abusive parents. Such stories invite readers to see how these homes differ from what a home should, ideally, be. Anthropologist Margaret Trawick has also made this

observation in her book *Enemy Lines: Childhood, Warfare, and Play in Batticaloa*. However she only states it in order to show the difference between what literary childhood and actual childhood are. In this she holds opposing views to Griswold who believes children's literature to be a fair representative of its readers. Trawick writes:

> In the state of (ideal) childhood, one is free, and unconstrained by more powerful people (including other children). Nobody is more powerful than the ideal child. There may be threats, either animate or existential or both, but in the state of ideal childhood one can outmaneuver them and ultimately defeat them. Peter Pan exemplifies such a state. The runaway Huckleberry Finn seeks and to a certain degree attains it. Pippi Longstocking, perhaps more than any other, is in such a state, and so is Harry Potter. Ender of *Ender's Game* is in such a state, although he must struggle with its implications—above all, the possibility that he will lose his humanity. Outside the state of ideal childhood, a real-life child must do as authority dictates. A real-life child must be good. But the ideal child is amoral. (8)

Trawick, though using the very same examples Griswold discussed earlier as being the embodiment of what childhood is, offers a completely inverted viewpoint. To her, Peter Pan and his carelessness, as well as Harry Potter and his struggles, are no ambassadors of childhood, for they can exert their will as they desire; a liberation that the real child cannot reach, having to comply to authority at all times. The actual child has to answer for his/her acts, when the protagonist can show mischievousness and rebellion without loosing the love and admiration he/she inspires, writes Trawick. "Who would not

wish to live in the state of ideal childhood? I would not, but only because I know such a state must be an illusion, from which, if one entertains it, one must eventually fall and be hurt. It might be called an infantile fantasy. But do any infants really have this fantasy? Maybe a few." (9)

Is there, then, an actual state of childhood? If we follow Trawick's argument and consider literature an idyllic (and even undesirable) representation of the space children evolve in, how should childhood be characterized? Is there such a thing as one childhood with features common to all? Or does the vision we have of childhood depend on culture and context? Play and make-believe stories have been proven to be affected by adverse circumstances. Physiologist H. Cullumbine explained in an article entitled "Heat Production and Energy Requirements of Tropical People" that it is less likely to be found in "malnourished and insecurely attached children." (203) It is undeniable that there are variations in the amount and type of pretend play, according to culture's influence. However, no matter how scarce, its presence remains ubiquitous, as was argued in the first chapter of this dissertation. According to Joseph Dombrowski and Diana Slaughter, who did anthropological research on the ecological context of children's play in the late 1980s, "children's social and pretend play appear to be biologically based, sustained as an evolutionary contribution to human psychological growth and development. Cultural factors regulate the amount and type of expression of these play forms." (290)

It would then appear that characters like Peter Pan, whose main attribute is the ability to make believe, do belong to the world of childhood, as Griswold suggested in his book. There might be a biological need to daydream and play pretend in the child, as much as the human being in general needs to sleep and dream.

Fiction describes this inner world of children's games, lives and imagination that can less easily be conveyed in anthropological works, despite a thoroughly detailed research. In Tobias Hecht's *After Life: An Ethnographic Novel*, the narrator tells the readers that it is "not a true story but aims [at] describ[ing] a world." (8) This is what children's literature also aims at. Fiction becomes a sort of supplement to anthropology, by giving an inner perspective to the world of childhood. Literature can describe the inner worlds, the minds and thoughts of its characters; things that anthropological studies cannot have access to. Fiction conveys the life of a mind from the inside. What is born is the life of someone else's mind.

Fiction, as well as children's play, brings the mind of someone else to life. In Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, the Mole breathes life into the river as he lays eyes upon it for the first time. He gives it character and secrets, under Grahame's pen, and children readers can picture it as it comes to life in their minds too.

> Never in his life had he seen a river before – this sleek, sinuous, full-bodied animal, chasing and chuckling, gripping things with a gurgle and leaving them a laugh, to fling itself on fresh playmates that shook themselves free, and were caught and held again. All was a-shake and a-shiver – glints and gleams and sparkles, rustle and swirl, chatter and bubble. The Mole sat bewitched, entranced, fascinated. By the side of the river he trotted as one trots, when very small, by the side of a man who holds one spellbound by exciting stories; and when tired at last, he sat on the bank, while the river chattered on to him, a babbling procession of the best stories in the world. (3)

The river is here an animal-like, alive, conscious and companionable entity. Such a description would be hard to convey as powerfully through an anthropological study. Literature holds a liminal position; it is a threshold to the life of other minds and worlds. Yet, if the hypothesis that fiction is the only way to convey the mind of the child from the inside stands true then one must ponder the fact that, in the particular instance that is children's literature, the inside perspective that it transcribes is not actually born out of the child's mind but out of fully grown writers. The assumed inside perspective could not be more external. What position do authors of children's literature adopt in order to remedy such a gap?

Writing for children seems closely associated to the idea of writing for a younger self, which always conveys a sort of ingrained nostalgia of authors towards their childhood. Discussing the process of writing for children with French author Erik L'Homme at the 2012 edition of Montreuil's Salon du livre et de la presse jeunesse, I was told that in writing for kids or teenagers, one must remember being young and find echoes of that past state. "I usually create characters who are about 13 years old, and to accomplish that I need to level myself to them. I mean I try to figure out what their outlook on things would be. I try to see the world through their eyes, the way they would or could see it. So I just try and remember the 13 year-old boy I used to be." To which British author Michael Morpurgo, also a guest of the book convention, added: "You should always write for yourself, never have others in mind. It is the only way to make the stories ring true."[54] There seems to prevail in authors' attestations a longing to reconnect with one's past self that raises questions.

[54] Courtesy of Erik L'Homme and Michael Morpurgo.

Indeed, ascertaining such melancholic attitude towards childhood, one has the right to wonder: whose reality, experience and world are depicted in children's novels? Whose thoughts are they: the child's or the author's? The position of the writer needs to be questioned. What relations are there between the thoughts and feelings of the novelist and the thoughts and feelings of the people whom he or she tries to describe? Is literature – and its claimed inner perspective – truly more faithful to the world of childhood than is anthropological research, when both actually stand from the outside?

In *The Hidden Adult*, Canadian professor Perry Nodelman reports:

> The continuance of childlike thinking in adults may be simply a matter of memory. The children's novelist Philippa Pierce says, "Writing about and for children, one should have a view almost from the inside, to re-create – not what childhood looks like now – but how it felt back then." The children's novelist William Mayne agrees: "I write for myself, but myself of long ago." (191)

According to the statements of many authors of children's literature, childhood would appear to not be the impermeable and sacred realm of children only but to also serve as a haven to the adult author's memories. Writing for children seems to be motivated by a strong need to keep in touch with oneself, or a prior self, as if the act of writing could make the adult whole again, connected to all parts of his life. "Childhood [has] become less a period of life than it is a state, an area left unscathed inside the depths of each individual," claimed Gaston Bachelard.[55] Is the fictional child nothing more than a melancholic projection of its author's fantasy of a lost idyllic childhood, then? Is it a

[55] Quoted in Chelebourg, Christian, and Francis Marcoin. *La Littérature de jeunesse*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2007. Print. 9

way to fix in memory the illusion of a freer time, safe from the absurdity of the adults' world?

Just as children reportedly do, novelists blur the lines between their selves and – rather than others – their past selves. Facts and fictions are intertwined. They talk about a re-creation of the past but how trustworthy can this be when it is a well-established fact that time distorts memories? In the article "Animals as People in Children's Literature," scholars of cognitive science Carolyn Burke and Joby Copenhaver argue that once the memory of childhood is triggered – by a beloved story or song from early infancy, for example, – "we are able to recreate, in detail, who we were, what we were doing, the values and beliefs that we were developing, and how we were coming to relate to others and to our world." (205) Far be it from me to belittle the strong emotional pull of memory, yet I find this position slightly naïve. Naturally, with the help of a favorite tale or a fond memory, one might have a recollection of his or her past self, nevertheless the detailed version that Burke and Copenhaver point at is as much an illusion as is German professor Hans-Heino Ewers's interpretation that "if an adult truly wishes to take part in genuine children's literature, he must return to being a child himself." (24)[56] This statement raises two questions: is there such a thing as genuine children's literature when adults invariably write all stories, and if there was, what would qualify as authentic or fake? And how would anyone be able to fully dismiss their present self to morph into a being of their past, especially when it is a proven fact that human memory is not the most reliable of sources?

[56] Ewers, Hans-Heino. "Le comique dans la littérature enfantine de langue allemande." *L'humour dans la littérature de jeunesse*. Ed. Jean Perrot. Paris: In Press Editions, 2000. Print. 19-28

Indeed, in 2013, Patricia Bauer and Marina Larkina, psychologists at Emory University, published the first empirical study of a phenomenon called "childhood amnesia" (a term coined by Sigmund Freud). Working with 83 children they were able to establish that early memory (prior to the age of age 3) starts fading into oblivion around the age of 7 due to the fact that they lack the strong neural architecture to form lasting memories. Bauer and Larkina compare the child's neural system to a pasta drainer, holey, when the adult's would be closer to a net. According to the study, before the age of 7, young children will be able to remember more events but with a vague narrative when, after 7, their memories will be fewer yet more complete and detailed.[57] Consequently, the detailed reminiscence or full transformation to a younger self is rather unlikely. The fact that our brain naturally distorts memories over time does not support such a romanticized theory either. According to a medical study conducted at Northwestern University in 2012 with the help of 12 participants,

> a memory is not simply an image produced by time traveling back to the original event – it can be an image that is somewhat distorted because of the prior times you remembered it. […] Your memory of an event can grow less precise even to the point of being totally false with each retrieval. […] Memories aren't static. If you remember something in the context of a new environment and time, or if you are even in a different mood, your memories might integrate the new information.[58]

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[57] To learn more, please refer to the study: Bauer, Patricia, and Marina Larkina. "The onset of childhood amnesia in childhood: A prospective investigation of the course and determinants of forgetting of early-life events." *Memory* Volume 2, Issue 8: Nov. 2013. 907-924. Web. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09658211.2013.854806#tabModule>

[58] "Your memory is like the telephone game," interview granted by researcher Donna Bridge on September 19th, 2012, and transcribed by Maria Paul for *Northwestern University News*. Web. <http://www.northwestern.edu/newscenter/stories/2012/09/your-memory-is-like-the-telephone-game.html>

The idea that one might be able to channel his or her inner child and write "authentic" children's literature, though charming, is nothing more than a myth. But then, how is children's literature created? What obstacles does it encounter along the way? And how is the relationship of trust between reader and author – upon which depends the belief in the story – established when the latter can only operate from a remote perspective?

Anthropologist Margaret Trawick argues that:

> outside the state of ideal childhood [i.e. the one depicted in children's fiction, according to Trawick], a real-life child must do as authority dictates. A real-life child must be good. But the ideal child is amoral. He or she can get into all kinds of mischief, can wreak bloody havoc, and still do no wrong, still be adored. The real-life child is small, inconsequential, and dirty; a real-life child constantly stumbles, makes mistakes, and is subject to shame and punishment. A real-life child may have to go hungry. An ideal child is flawlessly beautiful and irresistibly attractive, suffers no unfulfilled desires, and possesses perfect grace. (9)

It is undeniable that the real-life child is not free to do as he or she pleases and does not necessarily encounter a happy-ending to his or her problems. Childhood is as much a time of suffering as it is of play. Trawick's view, though not devoid of truth, is nevertheless guilty of the same extremism she accuses authors of children's literature of employing excessively. If the latter tend to empower childhood with limitless omnipotence and feel-good moments, Trawick seems to conceive the child as utterly

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To read the full study, please refer to: Bridge, Donna and, Joel Voss. "Hippocampal binding of novel information with dominant memory traces can support both memory stability and change." *Journal of Neuroscience*, 34: 2203-2213. February 2014. Web. <http://www.donnajobridge.com/pdf/bridge14.pdf>

defenseless and doomed to unhappiness, which might be just as far-fetched. It also leaves out the darker dimension of children's fiction. Indeed it is not always pretty and sweet; some children protagonists are bullied, beaten up – to a pulp even, in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*: "what used to be [Gale's] back is a raw, bloody slab of meat," (2: 104) – lose their close ones (Jesse is left to deal with grief and denial over his friend Leslie's accidental drowning in Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia*), or even die, with reasons ranging from accident or sacrifice (Tris deciding to take the death serum to save her brother from having to do so in Veronica Roth's *Divergent* series), to violence (Simon being mistakenly slaughtered by his frenzied companions during a ritual tribe dance in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*) and sickness, as John Green's character Augustus deteriorates and passes away in *The Fault in Our Stars*:

> It was horrible. I could hardly look at him. […]
>
> According to the convention of the genre, Augustus Waters kept his sense of humor till the end, did not for a moment waiver in his courage, and his spirit soared like an indomitable eagle until the world itself could not contain his joyful soul.
>
> But this was the truth, a pitiful boy who desperately wanted not to be pitiful, screaming and crying, poisoned by an infected G-tube that kept him alive, but not alive enough. (245)

Though a tad excessive, Trawick's statement nonetheless raises pertinent questions regarding the exchange between authors and their target audience. Surely the life of real children is harder than that of their literary counterparts; for no matter what grief or burden the characters carry, they tend to find ways to resolve them and always

grow stronger, which might not be such an easy task for real children, who are not about to receive their Hogwarts letter anytime soon. As such, one must wonder about the actual credibility of the writings and the mechanism behind the adherence of readers – if adherence there is.

"The potential space between baby and mother, between child and family, between individual and society or the world, depends on experience which leads to trust. It can be looked upon as sacred to the individual in that it is here that the individual experiences creative living," explained Winnicott. (1971 103) The same holds true when it comes to the implicit trust existing between writer and reader. Only through such a secure bond can the story come to life and be relevant. The act of creating a literary character could be perceived as breathing life into someone else's mind, yet for that "life" to live on, the reader must accept it as fair and believable. Now, when it comes to children's literature, how is that trust built? And, if we are to follow Winnicott's reasoning, upon which experience?

Fiction is the experience of producing and receiving representations. It is based on a consensus between author and audience, a fictional and playful "shared pretense," as American philosopher John Searle phrased it (71). According to French scholar Jean-Marie Schaeffer, fiction implies a conscious act of "free adherence" from the reader (151). The latter should enter fiction with the knowledge that he or she will be submersed in a pretense dominion, from which he/she will most likely learn and grow. "The function of literary pretense is to create an imaginary world and to lead the receiver into submerging in it, it is not to induce the receiver to believe that this imaginary world is the real world." (Schaeffer 156) The relationship of trust between author and audience lies

upon a tacit agreement that, though fictitious, the literary world can bring solace, reflection, knowledge and entertainment. Yet, the need for that agreement to be conscious is primordial, so as not to step into the sphere of mental illness. How does this implicit contract operate in children readers, though? If the child's pretend play is indeed deliberate and can be shared among players, – as was seen in the first chapter of this dissertation – does literary pretense obey the same rules and know a similar *modus operandi* when it is born from the mind of an adult outsider?

A handful of children's books will address their audience directly, so as to make that so-called trust contract more explicit, engaging the readers into an interactive pretense, one they can either knowingly welcome (and cultivate) or reject. "If you can think of anything more terrifying than that [i.e. being kidnapped by human-eating giants] happening to you in the middle of the night, then let's hear about it," Dahl's Big Friendly Giant dares its readers. (17) Characters' interaction with the reader is a clever way to temper the tricky question of agency that the very concept of children's fiction raises. Indeed, by inviting the young audience to ponder what could be worse than cannibal giants snatching them out of bed in the dead of night, the fact that said giants might not actually exist is less likely to be raised; and the child willingly enters the pretense at play as if it were his or hers since he/she validated it by answering that no, there could indeed hardly be anything worse than being kidnapped by giants intent on eating them. By addressing the readers directly, the author makes them accomplices of the pretense. If the writer can make the children believe in the story and participate in the truth handed to them then they just might automatically take the author's authority over the definition of childhood as undisputable. Dahl subtly drives the point home through his characters'

dialogue: "'I has told you before that human beans is simply not *believing* in giants.' / 'Then it's up to us to find a way of *making* [the Queen of England] believe in them,' Sophie said. […] 'We don't *have* to tell her! We'll make her *dream* it!'" (118-9) First, how many children would think to challenge the qualifications of a Queen – if she does end up believing, it has to be true, and so they as well should believe – but also, the real ploy resides in the "dream" part of Sophie's sentence. Some things do not have to be told or witnessed to be true: dreams, imagination, fiction, etc. all hold some truth in them. As such, Dahl might just have been writing: "I may no longer be a child but if I can imagine childhood then who is to say that my vision is not accurate?" when he made his BFG voice the foolishness of not believing: "Yesterday […] we was not believing in giants, was we? Today we is not believing in snozzcumbers. Just because we happen not to have actually *seen* something with our own two little winkles, we think it is not existing." (48)

A similar technique can be found in the first book of Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, in which unfold all the twists and turns of the three Baudelaire orphans' (Violet, Klaus and Sunny) lives. The author's peculiar choice of surname for his protagonists is an obvious nod to French poet Charles Baudelaire, adding to his narration a double register of complicity between child and adult readers – for, as C.S. Lewis once wrote, "a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story." (507) In Snicket's books, it is not the characters that address the audience but the narrator himself, warning the young of the turmoil they are about to experience in a letter plainly starting with "Dear readers." (1: iii) The story will be sad and full of perils, Snicket warns, going even as far as giving the plot away: "In this short book alone, the three youngsters encounter a greedy and repulsive villain, itchy clothing, a disastrous fire, a

plot to steal their fortune, and cold porridge for breakfast." (1: iii) Throughout the series of books, Lemony Snicket (which is actually the pen name of American novelist Daniel Handler) maintains his auctorial homodiegetic role. As narratologist Jaap Lintvelt explained in *Essai de typologie narrative*, a homodiegetic narrator (i.e. one who is a character in the story as opposed to heterodiegetic, distant but all-knowing – following Genette's terms) can be either auctorial when "situated within the narrator" part or actorial when he coincides with a character of the story and acts upon the plot. (106-108) Lemony Snicket is homodiegetic as he is a character of the story (even revealing throughout the series that he used to be in love with the Baudelaire children's late mother) but merely auctorial, since his function is only to make the tale believable and not advance it further. He is part of the novel – and a fiction in himself, playing the part of the sworn transcriber of the Baudelaire kids' unfortunate lives – but does not act upon the plot. In his address to the readers, Snicket claims to be writing the biography of his characters, a pretense he subtly invites the audience into entering fully, while telling them that there is still time to change their mind and switch to a more pleasant read. "It is my sad duty to write down these unpleasant tales, but there is nothing stopping you from putting this book down at once and reading something happy, if you prefer that sort of thing." (1: iii) If they choose to go on, though, then the contract of trust is signed, the narrator's authority uncontested and the readers fully emerged in the tale. Handler's narratorial game is repeated with each of the 13 *Unfortunate* books, a "Dear readers" letter offering the choice of belief and re-affirming his agency over the text before any new read:

> I am bound to record these tragic events. (2: iii)

> I will continue to record these tragic tales, for that is what I do. You, however, should decide for yourself whether you can possibly endure this miserable story. (3: iii)
>
> I have promised. (4: iii)
>
> It is my solemn duty. (5: iii)
>
> As a dedicated author who has pledged to keep recording the depressing story of the Baudelaires, I must continue to delve deep into the cavernous depths of the orphans' lives. You, on the other hand, may delve into some happier book in order to keep your eyes and your spirits from being dampened. (11: iii)

This technique is as effective in creating a bond of trust over the proclaimed truth of the story as the interaction between characters and readers is. Yet both of these literary devices maintain some distance from the audience, addressing it directly but refraining from impersonating it. Which brings us to a third and most efficient trope to deliver trust and belief: the pretense of the child narrator. The first person narrative seems to give voice to the child, handing him/her the agency over the tale, or pretending to, at least. If the narrator and main child protagonist are one and the same, identification and faith become all the more successful. There is no need to even directly address the readers for they are meant to impersonate the child character, himself/herself impersonated by the narrator, stemming from the adult author's imagination of what a child is.

French author Pierre Bottero was an adept of the childish "I," using it in his fantasy novels for children and young adults and often proclaiming his strong attachment to childhood in interviews as well:

> To me the imagination of childhood is connected to reality. / […] As a child I used to dream of astonishing adventures swarming with dangers but I could not find the door to a parallel world! I ended up convincing myself that there was no such thing. I grew up, grew old, and settled for a classic world… until the day when I started writing novels. A scent of adventure then slithered in my life. Odd colors, surprising creatures, strange cities… I had found the door.[59]

In a way, what Bottero was saying is that in writing for children he found the path back to the wonders of childhood and opened the door for all to read and journey along. In his novel *Fils de sorcières* (Son of Witches), Bottero's young narrator, ten year-old Jean Sylvestre tells his story as if having a friendly conversation with the reader. He embodies that same frustration from childhood that the author was describing in his past inability to find the door to something more, empathizing with children and their typical failed attempts at magic (honestly, who has not tried at least once, believing they might be different?), waiting for their Hogwarts letter or rummaging about, hoping to discover the closet gateway to Narnia, etc.

> Je m'appelle Jean, Jean Sylvestre, et je ne suis pas sorcier. / Même pas un tout petit peu ! / Ma mère est sorcière, ma grand-mère est sorcière, mes tantes sont sorcières. Jusqu'à Lisa, ma petite sœur […]. / Moi, rien ! Rien du tout ! / J'ai pourtant essayé. Je me suis concentré, à me faire exploser le crâne. J'ai inventé des formules encore plus compliquées que mes leçons de grammaire. J'ai même bu une potion de mon invention, à

[59] Words collected in November 2007 for the website www.fantastinet.com, and Bottero's writer profile on www.gallimard-jeunesse.fr

> base de vieux café dans lequel j'avais fait tremper des orties et, j'ose l'avouer, une crotte de lapin. C'est la seule fois où il s'est passé quelque chose. / J'ai vomi. / Sinon, rien ! Pas le moindre début d'un quelconque pouvoir magique ! (14-15)[60]

In making Jean's annoyance – and quirkiness – one that all children can identify with, Bottero made his character an incarnation of all readers, making the very question of belief void. "In their early role play, young children situate themselves in an imagined world and process events from the point of view of a pretend protagonist. Similarly, when they start to listen to narratives, children mentally locate themselves within the narrative world and process events from the point of view of the narrative protagonist," explains American psychologist Paul Harris in *The Work of the Imagination* (53). This mental "relocation" is facilitated by the use of a first person child narrator.

The childish "I" device is a clear sign of the "rise of childhood in the contemporary fictional universe," according to child's play researcher Jean Perrot. (1987 242) Authors want to feel closer to their lost childhood, trying to relive it through their writings. "There is such a temptation for adults to find themselves reflected in the play and fantasy of children," concurs anthropologist Veena Das. "Yet I have found that children create social worlds of their own which are impenetrable to adults," she adds (291).

[60] "My name is Jean, Jean Sylvestre, and I am not a wizard. / Not even a little bit! / My mother is a witch, my grandmother is a witch, my aunts are witches. Even Lisa, my little sister [...]. / Me, nothing! Nothing at all! / I did try, though. I focused, to the point of making my skull explode. I invented formulas even more complicated than my grammar lessons. I even drank a potion I designed, with old coffee in which I soaked nettles and, I dare admit, rabbit poop. It's the only time something happened. / I threw up. / Otherwise, nothing! Not even the slightest trace of some remote magical power!"

The idea of an enclosed world of childhood is one that, as we have seen, emerges frequently in discourses about pretend play and children's literature. It feeds the common notion of youth as a period of idealized freedom. Yet, it might not actually do a disservice to the child reader in that it is part of what makes this literary reconstruction of childhood appealing – and by extension penetrable – to him/her. Indeed, the child protagonist might go through a spectrum of sorrows (think Hodgson Burnett's little orphan Sara pealing potatoes in rags for hours on end before having her fortune restored, or Malot's Rémi going hungry on the roads and being adopted only to be disadopted, among other eventful hardships, before finding his true family) but he/she will always find hope because "happiness can be found even in the darkest times if one only remembers to turn on the light."[61] The – often-predictable – happy-endings experienced by the young characters might not simply be a question of nostalgically finding one's inner child, or rediscovering the secret entrance to that wonderful yet impenetrable lost world of childhood, but might actually help the young readers into overcoming the feelings of powerlessness that come with being a child. After all, children's literature does want its audience to believe that anything is possible.

French writer J.M.G. Le Clézio, in *Ailleurs: Entretiens sur France-Culture avec Jean-Louis Ezine*, voiced the desire to write the way that children play: "it would be nice to write the way we fly: take off, lose contact with reality... invent another life." (114) Le Clézio's vision of childhood as a time when imagination runs free inherently implies that his young audience will possess the capacity to fully take-off towards his narrative. In

[61] *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban.* Dir. Cuarón, Alfonso. Warner Bros, 2004. DVD. Quote by the character of Albus Dumbledore (portrayed by Michael Gambon).

pretend playing the child can superimpose the real and the imaginary, as should also allow the act of reading fiction. Is the idea that childhood is full of fun adventures and overcoming obstacles accurate? Only to some extent, but the truth is it does not matter much to children whether it actually is, for in reading they simply play at being a child – even though that child protagonist's reality might be as far from theirs as the adult who wrote them is. And, in doing so, they learn to be one along the way. It could be that the real-life child is the inspiration at the root of children's literature, or maybe that the literary child is the one who influences its readers into being a child. Determining which comes first is arduous. *De facto*, the concept of the "child" is but a social and historical construction to be found midway between what outsiders think it means and the daily lives of those concerned. "Childhood is not a natural state of innocence; it is a historical construction. It is also a cultural and political category that has very practical consequences for how children view themselves." (Giroux 5)

The truth is, children's literature is not the depiction of an authentic or universal childhood. There is no such thing and it does not aim at pretending otherwise. It is my analysis that it rather intends to portray what childhood should be or, at least, what it should be about. Discussing Miyazaki's *My Neighbor Totoro*, Tokyo-based journalist Tony McNicol writes in an article entitled "Studio Ghibli: Japan's Anime Dream Factory:"

> Set in an idyllic postwar Japanese countryside, Totoro tells the story of two young sisters' encounters with magical forest spirits, including the eponymous Totoro, a furry creature that lives inside an

enchanted forest. Critic Roger Ebert has described it as "a children's film made for the world we should live in, rather than the one we occupy."

This might give a partial answer as to what children's literature and media aim at doing. It might not merely be an overly idyllic and melancholic vision of childhood supposedly fit to the world of children (if there is such a thing). But rather, it conveys a message to both children and adults as to what the world should be like, what family units should resemble; what "we" should aim to make of it. The tales may be unreal but it does not make them untrue. "While what these stories tell about does not happen in fact, it [happens] as inner experience and personal development; [they] depict in imaginary and symbolic form the essential steps in growing up and achieving an independent existence." (Bettelheim 73)

As Griswold suggests, it would be foolish to romanticize the children's worldview as "truer than our own" (124) and their literature as the embodiment of childhood. For "there is not one childhood, but many, formed at the intersection of different cultural, social and economic systems, natural and man-made physical environments. Different positions in society produce different experiences," states sociologist Ivar Frønes. (1) And similarly, there is not one children's book, magically holding the answer to what being a child is. Especially as writers rely on their nostalgia and faded memories, what trust could be placed in their vision of childhood? Are children behaving in such ways because they learn it from children's books? Are their pretend abilities as vast as their literature suggests it?

This is where disciplines such as anthropology come to the defense of literature, for studies of childhood in populations who do not necessarily have access to fiction for

the young – as was seen earlier in this dissertation with the works of Naveeda Khan and Veena Das, notably – regardless display the same patterns of role-playing and imaginative creations in children. And contrary to popular beliefs, children's literature, like childhood itself, is not exempt from horror and sorrows. Authors' melancholy might actually be towards the loss of an ideal, rather than a true-to-life state of carelessness and sweetness. In displaying the "idyllic" child, or the problematic home, they might only aim at bettering the ways of the world. In this sense, writers and scholars preach the same lessons regarding children, though using different means to reach it. Research can give facts and real-life stories; it can give a face to the children talked about. Fiction breathes life into the minds of their protagonists, mimicking children's play. They actually mirror one another and the "child" – as a concept – is to be found somewhere in the middle of the many portraits they make of it.

Now, as to whether real-life children find their literary counterparts credible: reading, like playing, is a deliberate activity; they both require a disengagement from reality to give way to a belief in the newly produced codes. Both necessitate some risk taking, a leap of faith. "An identification dimension […] presides over every interesting read," (Rolland 112) but it is conscious and temporary, the same way pretend play is.

In reading, the child is experiencing otherness, more than a true reflection of what or who he/she is. It is an exchange, a shared action, or pretense, between the adult writer and its audience, between the parent reader and the child listener, between reality and fiction. And it is precisely within this blurry and fragile in-between (reality and pretense) that resides the child reader. "Reading," writes Annie Rolland, "is a creative, intermediary and structuring act […] which engenders fecund encounters." (201) It does

not hold the one and only truth over what a child is but offers snippets of what it could be for the short time it takes to read a story.

Furthermore, we tend to think of children and children's literature as being highly influenced – sometimes even controlled – by adults, yet the reverse is actually also true and becoming more so with every new young adult novel being published. The massive success of Rowling's *Harry Potter* series has for example been such that the British Oxford Dictionary has now officially integrated the word "muggle" into their database: "Muggle: a person who is not conversant with a particular activity or skill: *this video game won't appeal to muggles*. Origin: 1990s, from "muggle"; used in the *Harry Potter* books by J. K. Rowling to mean 'a person without magical powers'." From a neologism to actual language, the voice of childhood – even fictitious – is a powerful and eternal force.

This voice of childhood is also one of otherness – as will be seen in the next part of this dissertation – on many levels: children experiencing lives of others through protagonists, authors trying their hands at being this intriguing other that is the child through their writings and playing with the idea of otherness by bringing child and animal together in many stories.

Chapter 4:

Anthropomorphism or the empowerment of scale and imagery in children's picture books

Let us picture a box, just a regular, good old square. Now if we were to draw two legs to that box, would it start walking? And where would it take it us?

Following in the Little Prince's footsteps, one could say that the child's imagination knows no end. A hat is as much an elephant swallowed by a boa, as it is a headgear. So if we were to assume that anthropomorphism is born out of one's mind, is it infinite as well? Where is the line to be drawn when it comes to the animation of one's imagination?

But let us go back to our legged box, still walking, little trooper. Where is it going? And how did it come to life?

According to American scholar Jerry Griswold, there is, in the universe of children's literature and childhood, a "cosmic urge to come alive" (116). For the young readers, their stuffed toy, tin soldier, doll, or even flower dancing in the breeze, all are gifted with consciousness and have the ability to feel. Every single thing can be born to life and humanized once we dive "down the rabbit hole," as Lewis Carroll would have said. Therefore it is no surprise to see that children's literature is overflowing with anthropomorphic representations.

Tales of attributions of form, characteristics or human powers to animals, plants or objects have been around since the dawn of time. In 1757, British philosopher and historian David Hume claimed in *The Natural History of Religion* that "there is a

universal tendency amongst mankind to conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every object those qualities with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious." (25)

In spite of this omnipresence of humanization in both literature and human thought, it is interesting to notice that the very first definition of the word "anthropomorphism" did not appear until the 5th edition of the Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française, created in 1798, namely more than forty years after Hume's writings. At the time, it was a notion closely linked to the religious. Indeed, the definition simply reads: "Doctrine or opinion of those who assign to God a human figure." [62]

If we were to take a leap through the years and had a look at the present edition – the 9th – of the Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française, this one would reveal:

> ANTHROPOMORPHISM n. m. XVIIIth century. (Derived from the Greek *anthrôpomorphos,* composed of *anthrôpos,* « man», and *morphê,* « form, appearance ».) Tendency to attribute human forms or characters to divinities, forces of nature, animals, plants, etc. *Anthropomorphism frequently manifests itself in the spontaneous interpretation of physical phenomena.* [63]

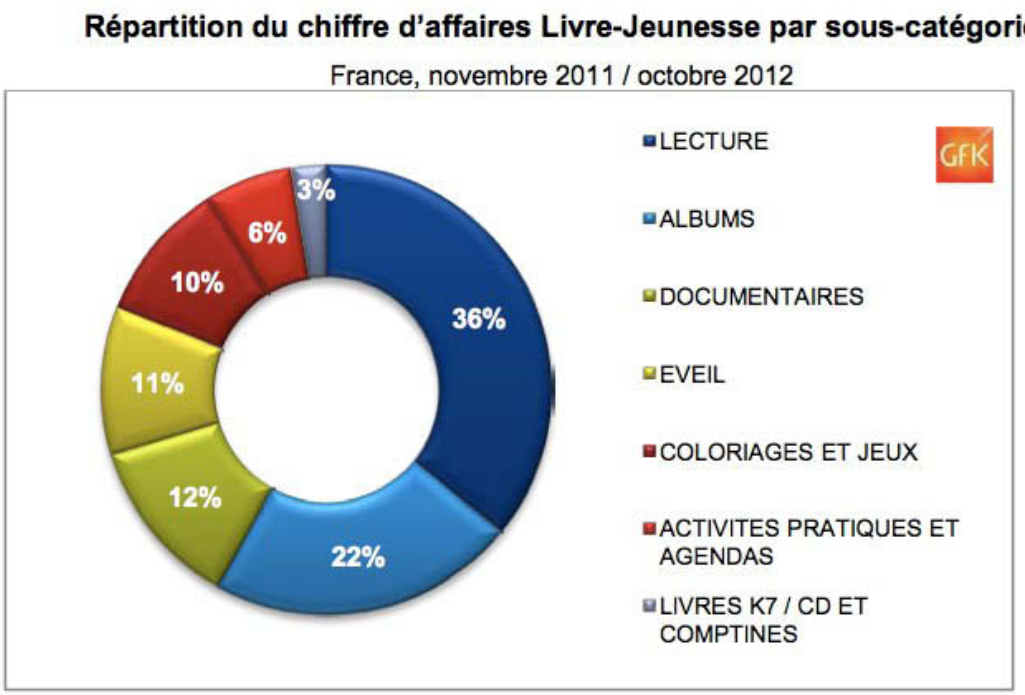
Anthropomorphism thus is the attribution of human characters to beings and things that are not. But, from where did such a tendency originate? According to children's literature, anthropomorphizing arose primarily from simple interrogations. Who does not recall, as a child, pondering on whether trees were not simply stretching their branches when the wind agitated them. Which child did not, when morning came,

[62] ARTFL Project: http://portail.atilf.fr/cgi-bin/dico1look.pl?strippedhw=anthropomorphisme&dicoid=ACAD1798&headword=&dicoid=ACAD1798
[63] http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/generic/cherche.exe?22;s=935913750;;

checked upon his/her toys to see if they had moved, mischievous, once the arms of Morpheus had taken him/her towards other imaginary lands? Little Marie Stahlbaum from Hoffmann's *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, written in 1816, is more than willing to admit that she saw her toy Nutcracker come alive at night to fight off the Mice Army. Her mother's dismissal of it as a fever-induced dream and her forbidding of further imaginary tales mean nothing to the seven year-old girl who simply reckons that she ought to keep her interactions with the wooden toy a closely guarded secret. Being told later on about the myth behind the physiognomy of the Nutcracker, she decides to right the wrong of his rejection by Princess Pirlipat and vows to love and cherish him were he to become real. Marie shows no sign of surprise to see him human again that very second and happily accepts to marry him a year and a day later – after what they elope to the Magical Doll Kingdom where she is crowned Queen. Naturally, the idea of an 8 year-old wedding a grown man is slightly disturbing but the interest of the tale lies in that seemingly limitless capacity of the child to animate and believe. Here the boundary between imagination and reality appears to be quite insubstantial. And it is this very infinite ability of the child to give life generously that keeps inspiring the illustrated universe of children's picture books for the very young.

I have chosen, in this chapter, to focus on the animal side of anthropomorphism in children's literature and this for two reasons. The first one is linked to statistics of the market of youth. Picture books represent 22% of the market of children's literature and more than 60% of these publications tell stories of humanized animals.[64]

[64] GFK Consumer Choices France 2012 data : < www.gfk.com/fr >. Web.



Flammarion publishing company even made a living of it in children's literature, with the collection *Le Père Castor*, created in 1931 by Paul Faucher. About 2000 anthropomorphic works are currently distributed under its banner. It thus truly is a considerable field of children's literature, even to an international extent, as the overflowing success of the adventures of *Peter Rabbit*, by British writer Beatrix Potter, can still notably attest. The main character is supposed to represent the young reader while offering the distance necessary to learning.

The second reason resides in the interest adults display regarding animality. What are the preoccupations of an author who willingly switches the young reader with an animal? What goals could he/she have in doing so, and what then transpires of his/her view upon said child? It shows an interesting desire to domesticate the others that are children and children's literature, which is why this chapter, as well as the next two, will focus on animality.

There undeniably exists a genuine history of animality and the act of questioning the boundaries between men and beasts dates back to Ancient Greece. We have actually entered a new time of reflection on this topic with, notably, the 2007 publication of Jean-Christophe Bailly's *Le Versant animal* and, in 2008, *Traduire le parler des bêtes* by Elisabeth de Fontenay and Marie-Claire Pasquier. These works call into question the frontiers of animality and go over the various human concepts regarding animals, from Ancient Greece up to the present day, broaching, among others, Descartes's theory of the animal-machine and the reason behind Derrida's 'animot' neologism. These philosophers embody two major schools of thought with regard to the confrontation between man and the animal.

According to Descartes's ethological hypothesis, the animal would act upon pure instinct only, rather than thought. It can therefore not be endowed with a soul and is consequently relegated to the rank of plain mechanism.[65] Jacques Derrida, as for him, wished to call into question the implicit superiority of man previously stated by Descartes. In « L'animal que donc je suis » (The Animal that Therefore I Am – to be understood both as being and following, in the original French), Derrida denounces the throes inflicted to animals as well as the everlasting desire of men to possess and master the animal. The 'animot' neologism – which in French is a play on words 'animaux' (i.e. animals in the plural) and ani-mot (from 'word,' therefore the lexical field of animality) – both alludes to a unique, singular plural because of its consonance: "neither a species, nor

[65] Descartes, René. *Discours de la méthode*, Paris : Fayard, 1986 (1637). Print.

a genre, nor an individual [but] an irreducible living multiplicity of mortals" [66] and reminds the audience of the power of words which, in their frequent anthropomorphic references, come to deny the animal of its alterity.

In the vein of these two great trends of thought, new productions on animality also discuss the possibility of a true communication between men and animals, a question that never ceases to stir science. In July 2011 actually came out James Marsh's *Project Nim*, which recounts the attempt of humanization of and exchange through sign language with a chimpanzee, in the 1970s, at Columbia University, USA. Attempt that ended in bitter failure and several sequelae for Nim as well as for the men with whom he was collaborating.

Therefore, animality and the question of a potential anthropomorphizing of the animal are subjects that live on, even though perspectives never cease to evolve. Besides, the animal is ubiquitous in fiction, the real world and philosophical discussions alike. It is at the origin of numerous myths, sometimes monstrous, sometimes heartwarming. Multiple occurrences when the animal is the synonym of a threat of regression to the wild state of nature can be found in literature and legends. Yet, there are just as many showing the animal taking the place of a lost family member. If, in the latter, it originally predominantly was a matter of tales narrating how nourishing animals would take upon a parental role (one will notably think of Remus and Romulus saved by the she-wolf), the passing of time has inverted this tendency. Indeed, men are nowadays so inclined to infantilize their pets that nature and its inhabitants are now frequently linked to childhood, both in literature and collective thinking. This tight link that exists between

[66] Derrida, Jacques. « L'animal que donc je suis (à suivre) ». *L'Animal Autobiographique : Autour De Jacques Derrida*. Ed. Marie-Louise Mallet. Paris : Galilée, 1999. Print. 292

the imaginary and true facts, around what makes a man or an animal, particularly dominates the world of children's picture books.

According to the definition of the CNRTL, a picture book is "a book where illustrations prevail," literally a "book of pictures for children."[67] The picture book for the young is a short story intended for pre-reading children to early readers – the target audience is situated between the age of 3 and 6 years old[68] – when the relationship between the text and the image is vital. What criteria make a story aimed at preschoolers whole and fulfilling? Picture books intend primarily to fill holes, soothe fears and teach the basics of an education to come. If a multitude of themes do exists, of course, within picture books, anthropomorphism remains the most widespread of all, since their very origin. Picture books are usually the very first literary objects with which a child comes in contact. The choice of themes – as well as the way they are treated – is thus highly essential, not only for the sake of children's good development but also to give birth to a true love of books within them. If, in the universe of picture books as well as in childhood itself there indeed seems to reign what Griswold calls a "cosmic urge to come alive" (116), this chapter will mainly focus on human characteristics attributed to animals.

Animals surely play a central part in stories intended for youngsters. Primarily standing on two legs rather than four, the animal claims to be, at the core of the picture book, a mirror of the child in this difficult time of fumbling, self-discovery and character-building. Why does the animal invade so many tales written for early childhood? For what purpose and, if it manages to fulfill it, how so?

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[67] <http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/album>
[68] Source : Flammarion - <http://editions.flammarion.com/catalogues_list.cfm?CategID=3894&OwnerId=3894>

The presence of anthropomorphic animals is a commonplace of children's literature. Already in the 7th century BC, hominoid animals were used with children towards didactic purposes, particularly in the case of *Aesop's Fables*. Thereafter fairy tales started to circulate widely, overflowing with anthropomorphic animals populating the nights of young, attentive ears. From the big bad wolf to the sly and cunning Puss in Boots, hominoid animals, via tales, myths and legends, permanently settled in stories intended for the young.

Indeed, fairy tales do mark the beginnings of anthropomorphic stories, notably in their function of learning from facing one's fears. Their first role was one of warning.

> In order to understand this particularity of "warning tales," one just needs to realize that they are *récits fonctionnels* [functional stories], which function, precisely, is to keep little ones away from the dangers that threaten them, water, fire, the woods, etc. For the lesson to be assimilated by the syncretic and anthropomorphic mind of the very young, the tale gives life to danger, morphing it into a troubling character, wild animal or monster whose features are more or less human, thus associating immediate physical fear to the location renowned as dangerous,

explains French scholar Marc Soriano in his *Guide de littérature pour la jeunesse* (64). If, naturally, it remains primarily an adult preoccupation aiming at educating the child through fear, the latter is nevertheless feeding on the undeniable fact that children's thoughts are animistic.

The young reader actually tends to attribute a conscience to all things, whether it be toys, plants, animals or improbable and minimal things like the crack on the ceiling of Madeline's hospital room, which "had the habit of sometimes looking like a rabbit." [69]


and a crack on the ceiling had the habit of sometimes looking like a rabbit.

The absence of boundaries between things and beings not only allows children to make sense of their world but also to escape the fear and boredom that overwhelm their life. This is the case with Madeline's ceiling, which distracts her from disease, or with young Mei and Satsuki who see in their friend Totoro – an anthropomorphic animal/creature – their mother's salvation while she is hospitalized for what the audience supposes to be cancer, in Hayao Miyazaki's Japanese animated movie *Tonari no Totoro*.[70] If all critics agree on the very wide distribution of human attributes – and the major part it plays – operated by children, the reason they give for it tends to differ. According to Jerry Griswold, it would first and foremost be due to the absence of exacerbated self-absorption that the adults display, which would allow for an increased permeability of boundaries between species and static objects. The child, whose ego is still in the process of being formed, would possess, according to Griswold, a non-dualist way of thinking allowing the state of consciousness to spread with prodigality (108-9). Bruno Bettelheim, as for him, was supporting an entirely opposite view:

> To the child trying to understand the world, it seems reasonable to expect answers from those objects which arouse his curiosity. And since the child is self-centered, he expects the animal to talk about the things

[69] Bemelmans, Ludwig. *Madeline*. New York: Viking Juvenile, 1939. Print. 25
[70] *Tonari no Totoro (My Neighbor Totoro)*. Dir. Miyazaki, Hayao. Studio Ghibli, 2010 (1988). DVD.

> which are really significant to him, as animals do in fairy tales, and as the child himself talks to his real or toy animals. A child is convinced that the animal understands and feels with him, even though it does not show it openly. (45-6)

Whether it emerges from excess or lack of ego – I would personally have a Bettelheimian inclination – the fact nonetheless remains that the gift of consciousness is an essential part of the life of a young child. Anthropomorphism, by virtue of its omnipresence in the daily life of the little ones and in the literature that targets them, helps them explain their relationship to the world, and define a place to be theirs amongst beings and things. Thus this same anthropomorphic literature purports to be an open window on the child's view of the world by trying to be the fairest reflection of it, as well as by attempting to answer the questions of its target audience. Does it accomplish to do so, and if it does, how so?

Bruno Bettelheim, in *The Uses of Enchantment*, had specified that for a story to be useful to the child reader – which is the claimed goal of children's literature – this story has to answer to a variety of criteria:

> For a story truly to hold the child's attention, it must entertain him and arouse his curiosity. But to enrich his life, it must stimulate his imagination; help him to develop his intellect and to clarify his emotions; be attuned to his anxieties and aspirations; give full recognition to his difficulties, while at the same time suggesting solutions to the problems which perturb him. In short, it must at one and the same time relate to all

> aspects of his personality – and this without ever belittling but, on the contrary, giving full credence to the seriousness of the child's predicaments, while simultaneously promoting confidence in himself and in his future. (5)

If, as it is commonly thought, the animal – like the child – frequently suffers from extreme infantilizing, it is nonetheless important to notice that, in the vein of what Bettelheim described as an accomplished book for children, the anthropomorphic story often comes to offer a powerful alter ego in the face of the presumed weakness of the child reader. How then does the picture book proceed to turn beings commonly considered frails into accomplished heroes?

"More than adults, children are fascinated with the issue of size and particularly with smallness. Only in Children's Literature is littleness so frequent a topic […], and only in that genre does the word little appear so frequently in titles […]. With the exception of a few adult books […] juveniles seem to own the terrain of the miniature," writes Jerry Griswold (51). It is true that smallness is one of the most characteristic features of children's literature, whether it concerns protagonists, spaces or vocabulary. If it is, of course, primarily a question of creating a mirror effect of the immediate entourage of the target reader, it nonetheless is a fact that other advantages follow. Indeed, there is a genuine feeling of absolute autonomy within the miniature. There is, after all, in the miniature world, a sense of completion coming from the fact that, there, children can evolve in a world not only sculpted to their scale but that they can also thoroughly know and master. The child towers over the miniature, becoming at once –

and for once – the all-knowing and all-powerful. Disney's *Lilo and Stitch* illustrated this innermost desire of the child when anthropomorphic alien/animal-like Stitch builds a model of the city of San Francisco, only for the pleasure of dominating and tearing it down, displaying full control over his environment.


[71]

Which, actually, raises the equally dominant fascination of youngsters for all things giant. Indeed, children themselves become giants in the miniature they like so much. Truth is the world is merely gigantic to a preschooler and though frightening – as ogres, trolls and tales of young children lost in the immensity of the woods suggest, – it remains a riveting topic of interest. The large is both to be feared and coveted. And picture books aim at fulfilling this intricate behavior of its readers regarding size and the various forms of thrill that might emerge from it.

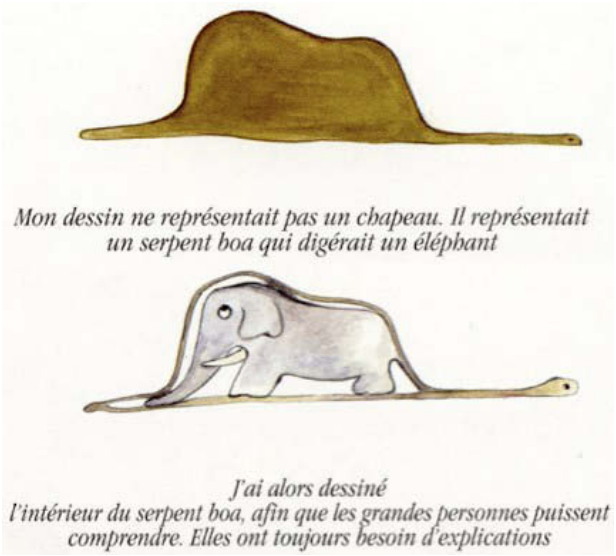
Reading will become a pleasure for the child if it is synonymous of a time of discovery, enchantment, daydreaming and even elation. For it to be so, the story must answer its young reader's needs; a variety of needs among which can be found a desire

[71] Lilo & Stitch. Dir. Sanders, Chris, and Dean Deblois. Walt Disney Studios, 2009 (2002). DVD.

for security intertwined with a curiosity for knowledge, the whole thing creating a feeling of satisfaction when reading. There also is the need to love and be loved, along with the protagonists, as well as the desires to belong (understanding where we come from or to whom we look like), to succeed (without any sort of help from adults) and to change (in order to outgrow the fear of the unknown which possesses them and in order to be liberated from themselves). A variety of very paradoxical needs then, but to which children's literature must comply if it wishes to accomplish its writing goal, that is to educate one way or the other. Not to mention, naturally, the aesthetic dimension and the feeling of completion that beauty and order offer to the young reader. Highly complicated task for a writer, all in all.

The illustrated book for children claims itself to be synonymous of attractions and benefits for its young audience, not only towards personal pleasure but also, and maybe even especially, towards individual and societal maturity. By portraying children as anthropomorphic animals, the picture book allows young readers to discover themselves in a space fit to their height, where they are given all the keys in preparation for an entire mastery of this very space. The picture book represents the familiar under new features and explores the fascination of the child reader towards everything that pertains to the miniscule. Robert Louis Stevenson, in his *Essays in the Art of Writing*, wrote that anyone meditating upon his childhood had to "remember laying his head in the grass, staring into the infinitesimal forest and seeing it grow populous with fairy armies." (103) This fascination for the miniscule is the reflection in the child of a recognition of self within the small scale and consequently of the diminished power that ensues, but it is also the echo of a deep demand to conceive the world as a known entity – reassuring – and

autonomous, upon which is added the unconscious desire to play the adult and to "tower godlike over creation." (Griswold 46) Literature allows children to make sense of their world but mostly gives them the power to master it, by means of their imaginary. As Gaston Bachelard expressed it, "the imagined world gives us a home in expansion, the reverse side of the home within the bedroom" (1960 152), and this is precisely what picture books offer to their young audience. In the imaginary world, as with the natural inclination of children to give life to all things and beings, the limits of what is identifiable are a bit blurry. Forms are malleable; they become no more than play-dough



in the hands of the reader's mind. As Bachelard was mentioning, the imaginary world is always growing, always changing and expanding. There is, in children and their literature, a readiness and an availability of forms unique to them and the genre. A hat is nothing but an elephant swallowed by a boa if one wishes it to be[72] and food comes to those who can imagine themselves be and do anything they aspire to.

As Steven Spielberg's own take on Peter Pan – *Hook* – instructs all the willing children along with the self-forgotten adults (as characters and viewers alike contemplate empty plates and dishes), if you cannot first imagine something it is unlikely to happen:

[72] Saint-Exupéry, Antoine de. *Le Petit Prince*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1970 (1943). Print. 1-2 "My drawing did not represent a hat. It represented a boa snake digesting an elephant. / I then drew the inside of the boa snake, so that the grown-ups would understand. They always need some explaining."

"Peter Banning: What's the deal? Where's the real food?

Tinkerbell: If you can't imagine yourself being Peter Pan, you won't ***be*** Peter Pan, so eat up." [73]

And so, as Peter finally finds his "lovely wonderful thoughts," (Barrie 51) food comes to be.

"The small worlds of Children's Literature […]," writes Griswold, "in other words, present alternatives to consensual notions of dimension and, consequently, adult notions of importance. That is no small thing. Indeed, encountering a Miniland in Children's Literature, we might repeat Jan Morris's admiring comment about the country of Wales: "Its smallness is not petty; on the contrary, it is profound."" (73)

This quotation finds a particular resonance in the universe of picture books for the very young since, by its smallness and animal-like miniature, children are offered the possibility to confront their fears while keeping the necessary distance in order to maintain their emotional balance. The animal avatar allows the child to proceed to a risk-free identification to the main character. "At the center of these narratives, we tend to

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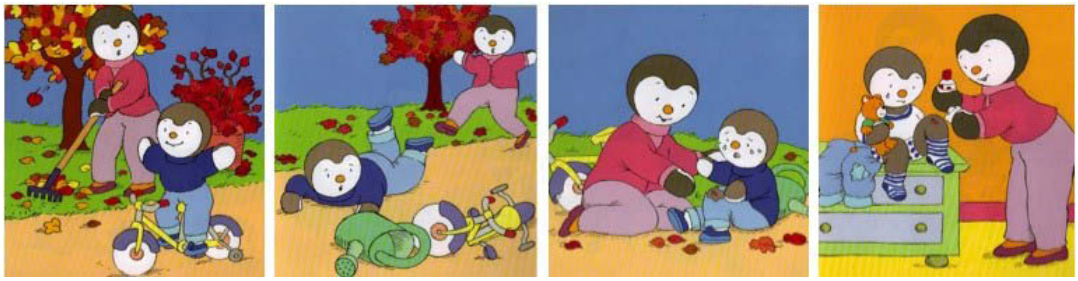
[73] *Hook*. Dir. Spielberg, Steven. Sony Pictures, 2000 (1991). DVD.

find human characters, human needs, and interests made more visible in the process of reflecting humanity in the otherness of the animal," claims South African professor Thomas Van der Walt (35). To this day, the most famous – and probably most blatant – example remains Jean de la Fontaine's *Fables*. Who did not sense, in the moral of the *Corbeau et le Renard* – « Mon bon Monsieur, / Apprenez que tout flatteur / Vit aux dépens de celui qui l'écoute »[74] –, the games at stake in King Louis XIV's court? Or, even more obviously so, in the *Obsèques de la Lionne*:

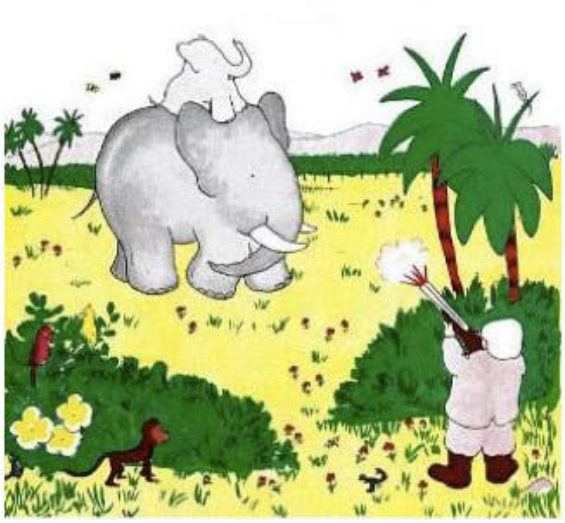
> Amusez les Rois par des songes, /
> Flattez-les, payez-les d'agréables mensonges : /
> Quelque indignation dont leur cœur soit rempli, /
> Ils goberont l'appât, vous serez leur ami.[75]

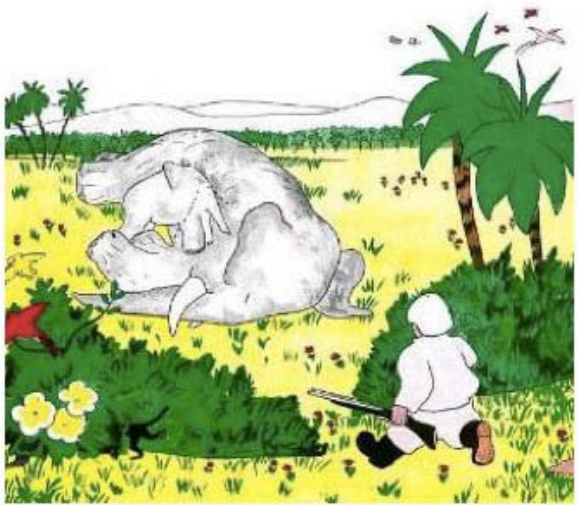
If it is here mainly a matter of social and political critique sheltered from censorship, it nonetheless remains that anthropomorphism allows the mirroring of all human behaviors with enough well considered distance not to conspicuously offend adult readers or scare off the youngest. Indeed, if the animal avatar allows children readers to confront their fears and pains from the comfort of their bedrooms, it is still quite important to highlight that the extent of throes tackled within picture books is among the widest, going from the simple fall of a bike for T'choupi (11-18)



[74] "My good Sir, / Learn that every flatterer / Lives at the expense of the one who hears him out"
[75] "Entertain the Kings with dreams, / Flatter them, pay them with pleasant lies: / For whatever indignation is the heart filled with, / They will swallow the bait, you will be their friend."

to the tragic assassination of Babar's mom by a hunter, under the watchful eye of the young hero. « Babar est tout joyeux, monté sur le dos de sa maman, lorsqu'un méchant chasseur, tapi derrière les buissons, leur tire dessus. Le chasseur a tué la maman de Babar ! » (6-7)[76]





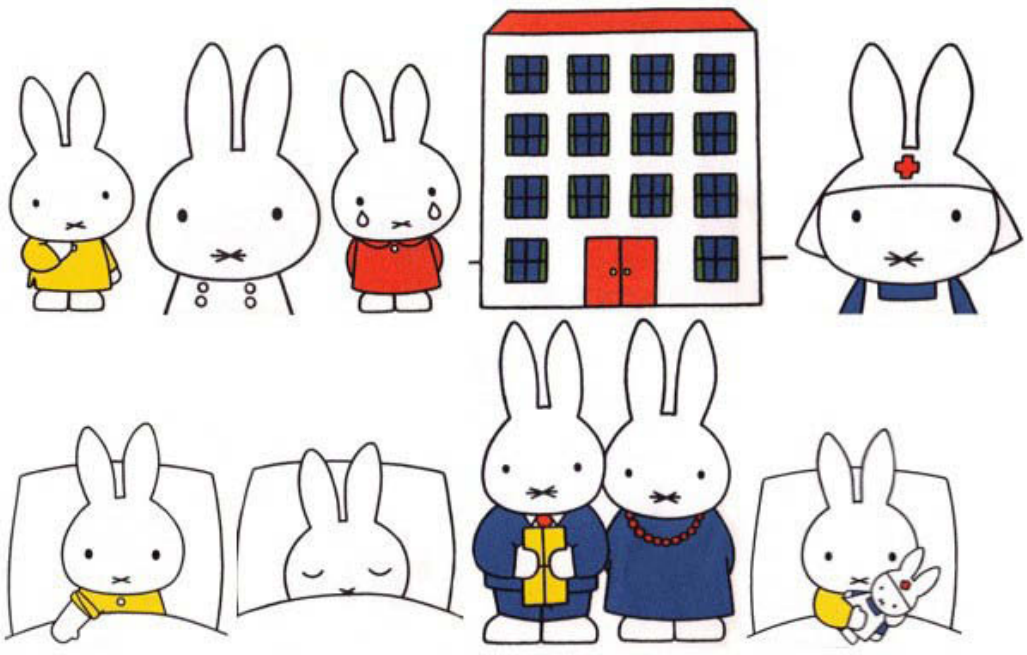
Children's literature, and *a fortiori* childhood, is actually not as sweet and carefree as adults want to believe it to be. Anthropomorphic characters are the embodiment of this omnipresence of dread in children's literature, both in the many fears lived by the characters and in the ones that the protagonists themselves can sometimes represent (nightmarish monster hidden under the child's bed, wolf come to devour naughty little ones, shadow that materializes in dark corners to engulf you, etc.). Picture books, like fairytales, "directly talk to the subconscious of the child by giving form to the tensions, fears, desires [and] anxieties that he feels. They allow him to understand what is going on inside him on a subconscious level, to elaborate his psychological conflicts," explains French scholar Annie Rolland (65). The use of an animal substitute allows children to

[76] "Babar is happily riding on his mommy's back when an evil hunter, hidden behind the bushes, shoots at them. The hunter has killed Babar's mom!"

face their fears in a safe environment, far from the more important implications that these may have in real life.

Picture books present a process of distancing that makes the young readers' worries less threatening. As American professor Arthur Applebee points out in *The Child's Concept of Story*, “by being involved less directly in the story, a person may be able to find solutions to predicaments which otherwise might not even be acknowledged.” (83) The highly malleable universe of children's literature precisely allows the creation of a – neutral – space of story, space that authorizes the tackling of the problems of the young lives of the readers without actually adding to their anxieties. Moreover, children are the “champions of intermediate space where they play (*jouer*) with reality and defy (*se jouer de*) fear. [...] The imaginary [thus] usefully filters the extremely violent reality of our existence,” Annie Rolland carries on. (18) Anthropomorphism allows children to detach themselves from situations that may disturb or overwhelm them. Identifying with the main character authorizes the resolution of fears only because said fears are but an image, sufficiently evocative, admittedly, for the message to be perceived, but still adequately fictional for the emotions arising from it to be dealt with by the child reader without excess. Anthropomorphic animals are used as a recipient for the child's fears and emotions. Therefore, it is not the young reader who goes to the hospital but poor little Miffy, in the eponymous series by Dick Bruna. Children are able, through the story, to prepare themselves softly for a medical check-up, surgery or any other type of apprehension of the unknown and of separation they may have. If Miffy finds it in herself to brave her fear of the hospital, and that all ends well since she is

healed and her mommy and daddy come to get her, with a gift as a bonus, so can the young reader then.[77]



"This distancing from reality also gives the child the opportunity to tame it."[78] The emotional distance offered by works that are often rightly called "tutors" presents the young reader with a perspective that is both egocentrist – indirectly it is I who is concerned – and more expansive – I am not the only one to experience such difficulties. Seeing the animal avatars live and survive going back to school, the arrival of a new brother or sister within the nuclear family, the loss of a loved one, etc., helps children grow within their self-consciousness. Anthropomorphism transcends fear, "through the looking-glass," so to speak. It allows young readers to open a new form of dialogue with themselves, within the asylum that is the story space. As such, the picture book abides by the laws of narratology. It offers comfort when fear and insecurities are at bay, fulfillment

[77] Bruna, Dick. *Miffy in Hospital*. London: World International Publishing, 1997 (1988). Print.
[78] "T'Choupi, Uki, Bali et Cie : l'anthropomorphisme dans les livres des tout-petits" *Les Petits cailloux* (2012). <http://www.mediatheque-la-clairiere.fr/OpacWebAloes/File/Petits%20cailloux%20plaquettes/anthropomorphisme.pdf>. 2. Web.

when the child suffers from syndromes of absence. Although the simultaneous narration – enhanced by the quasi-total use of the present tense in picture books – favors a mirror effect between the protagonist and the child, the distancing process provided by the animal figure allows the child-reader to "regulat[e] the narrative information"[79] and reach its full potential within the safety net of storytelling.

The mechanism behind this learning through the animal story is relatively simple. For the recognition by the child reader to take place within the picture book, all it needs is a small character, taken care of by a taller one, whatever their family or friendly connection may be. Children instinctively find themselves in the small one, who often tends to depict their daily lives. Thus, we have in *Petit Lapin Blanc* by Floury and Boisnard, an episode when the young character, while on vacation at his grandparents, is caught in a violent thunderstorm. He is shaking like a leaf until his grandfather holds him in his arms and his grandmother reassures

[79] Genette, Gérard. *Figures III*. Paris : Seuil, 1999 (1972). Print. 184

him: « L'orage, dit Mamie, c'est un peu comme un feu d'artifice. » (18)[80]

It is in these very simple open windows on their daily lives that children can recognize themselves and grow in their thoughts. They have no need for a character with a human face or for a "classic" family situation to perceive their reflection in the story, and the emotional distance that the tale guarantees allows them to broach bigger problems. Petit Lapin Blanc and his readers will thus learn together, in another story, that the arrival of a new baby does not mean that mommy and daddy do not love them anymore, or even love them less.[81] The same applies to the young kangaroo in *C'est trop injuste !* , who learns that if having to handle things on your own and having to pick up your own toys because you are the eldest is a bore, it is just as much so to be the youngest and not to be allowed to go play with your friends, just by yourselves.[82] The child who is no longer unique is presented with a multi dimensional place at the heart of a new nuclear family, which is a message that picture books for children try to convey to their young readers.

[80] "Thunderstorms, Granny says, are a bit like fireworks."
[81] Boisnard, Fabienne et Marie-France Floury. *Petit Lapin Blanc est jaloux*. Paris : Gautier-Languereau, 2008. Print.
[82] Harper, Anita, and Susan Hellard. *C'est trop injuste !* Paris : Gallimard, 2002 (1986). Print. 9-10/21-22

[83]

Along with the character, children thus start their learning of the social hierarchy and how to navigate emotional bonds. The picture book hence not only helps children to face and conquer their fears but also offers them different angles of looking at one situation, as has been seen in *C'est trop injuste !* As Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky explained, all forms of writing – whether it be fictional, factual or critical – are a tool for thought and that is why it is vital to give an account of the impact that works have, even when they seem as insignificant as picture books for children. "Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them." (Vygotsky 251)

Thought indeed fulfills itself through words – and images – in picture books. It does so on multiple levels, that of daily life and anxieties, as it has been presented above, but also those of a critic of society and the acceptance of differences. Jerry Griswold writes on the subject of the mirror and satirical effect that can sometimes have anthropomorphic literatures on the little ones:

[83] "Text on pictures: If he makes a mess of his toys, it's perfect. If I make a mess of mine, I get scolded. / It's not fair. [...] When I have little friends, my brother wants to play with us, but he is too young for us. / He makes us understand that he doesn't find it fair."

> In the world of children's stories, all God's creatures seem chatty – whether they be bears, birds, cats, elephants, bugs, lions, pigs, dogs, monkeys, or fish in the sea.
>
> We aren't surprised by talking animals in children's books because they feel and think like we do; there is no shock that might come from a more naturalistic presentation of their differences. In fact, the talking animals of children's stories so resemble us, they sometimes seem to be mocking us with their impersonations. (104)

As with fear, anthropomorphism offers the emotional and intellectual distance necessary for the humor of the caricature to be conveyed. In a similar fashion to La Fontaine's *Fables*, picture books see the animal avatar experience ridicule and adventures, leaving it up to the reader to draw a moral and maybe a smile from it, far from the humiliation of a real-life experience.

Anthropomorphism offers a neutral space for growth to take place. “The intellectual and emotional distance that the animals role-playing allows children and their mentoring adults grants space in which to become reflective and critical concerning life problems and life choices” (Burke and Copenhaver 212). Marie Colmont and Gerda Muller notably draw a sketch of this idea in *Marlaguette*, where a young wolf, grown fond of a little girl, tries its paw at vegetarianism. While the wolf withers before the readers’ eyes, an old man explains to little Marlaguette that a wild animal is not a man, and that it needs to live according to its nature. If the illustrations of the wolf on a green diet make the readers smile, (20)

it nonetheless remains that the lesson for parents and children alike is powerful, especially in the light of contemporary society who willingly dresses up its pets and likes to tame – or, rather, to try to tame[84]– what she calls NAC (i.e. exotic pets such as boas, pythons, spiders, etc.): "We cannot change the true nature of beasts (and of humans?...),"[85] says illustrator Gerda Muller. Nor should we.

The animal avatar, hoping to teach, thus willingly criticizes men and their flaws, no matter what the age range of the target audience might be, but it also wishes to be, with this same goal still in mind, a tool for erasing differences among men. Here again anthropomorphism allows the tempering of the didactic aspects of the lessons held within picture books for children. The clear fictional aspect that reigns in picture books with animal characters is then particularly important since it comes to distance fears and to

[84] NAC : Nouveaux Animaux de Compagnie.
[85] Henon, Judith, and Emmanuelle Martinat-Dupré. *Gerda Muller ou la poésie de la réalité*. Moulins : Centre de l'illustration. Print. 41

lighten the teaching offered at the same time. Fantasy opens new horizons, as observes Arthur Applebee:

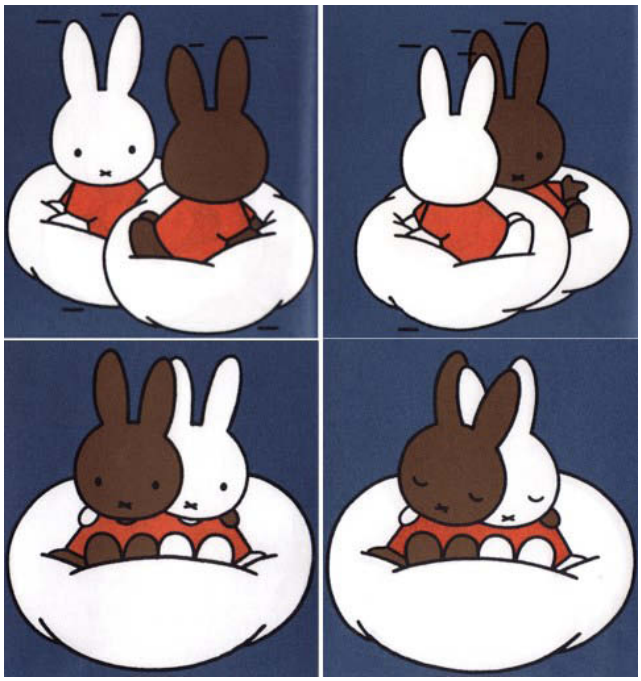
> Witches and fairies, Santa Claus and Cinderella – a child's familiarity with such characters represents a widening view of the world, an extension of the boundaries away from the self toward an unknown horizon. From this point of view, fantasy is not so much the "fantastical" as it is part of a continuum that begins in the world of immediate experience, passes outward toward distant lands, outward again into purely imaginative realms. (74)

Through the animal avatar, children readers do indeed subtly walk the path going from first experience towards social and moral education, via the developing of their imaginative abilities, all under the cover of entertainment. The aim of anthropomorphism is to seduce, to make things identifiable.

Beyond being a fair representation of the child's daily life, the anthropomorphic character is also often the occasion for the author to plead for a specific cause: fighting racism, advocating mutual assistance, protecting animals, praising respect, etc. According to Jerry Griswold, "When animals talk in children's books, the young become accomplices in a remarkable extension of sympathy and compassion." (106) Dick Bruna's *Miffy* series, as well as Paul François and Gerda Muller's *Les Bons Amis* are beautiful examples of the deconstruction of racial origins. The color code used for animals does not have the same implications it would have with human characters. The fact that animals can be of different colors is a fact willingly accepted by the child as going without saying. The art of picture books lies in making their anthropomorphic characters

as universal as possible in their personalities, so that the young readers themselves can operate a transfer of the qualities, and the equality prevailing within the story, to real situations. This way the first encounter between Miffy and a small brown rabbit that will become, later in the series, her American friend Melanie, happens in a dream. In the book, entitled *Miffy's Dream*, there is not a single word, making room for the illustrations' message, which is just as powerful.

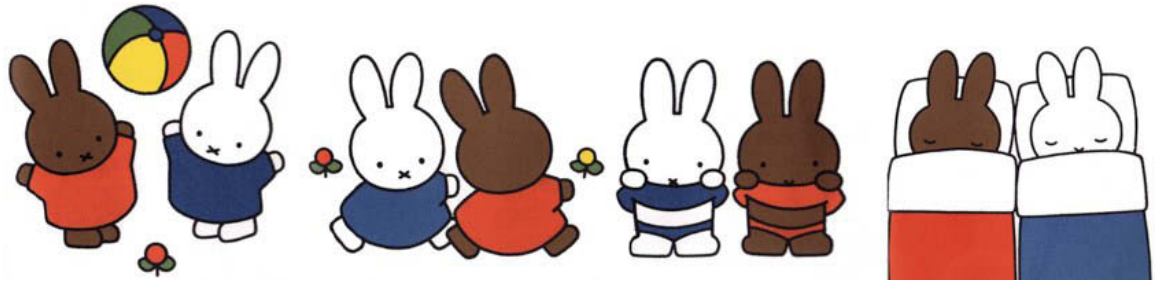
The two girls look up and down at each other from their respective cloud, before deciding that, since they are both here, they might as well play together. After several passes with stars and a few times sliding down the crescent moon, the two rabbits end up falling asleep snuggled against one another, and on the same cloud. (10/16/27-28)



Twenty years after *Miffy's Dream*, Bruna will draw the first official meeting of the two rabbits, in *Miffy and Melanie*, where he simply describes a random play day during the holidays that Melanie spends at Miffy's, her friend and pen pal.

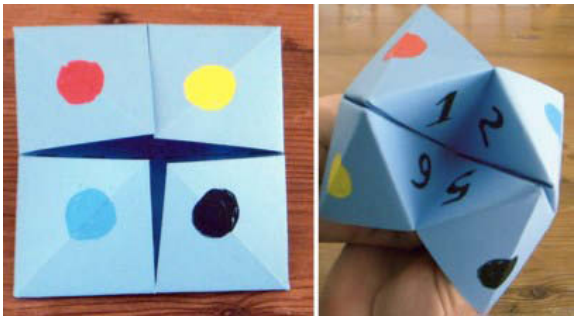
One cannot help but notice the highly elementary quality of Bruna's drawings, teaching his young readers the distinction of one and two – both as a counting trick and as recognition of self distinct from other and vice versa – through the alternating figures of Miffy and Melanie. There are, in the simple, clear lines, the basic forms and primary

colors of the illustrations, the foundations of a structural and cognitive education, bordering on elementary logic. Through the primitiveness of the imagery codes and the use of repetition, Bruna explicitly plays with exerting the cognitive strategy of knowledge assimilation. Not only does he toy with his drawings in order to teach the basics of logic and comprehension but he also uses them to preach a greater mind-openness towards differences.



The illustration showing both rabbits putting on their nightgowns reveals to the child-reader the exact symmetry between the friends' bodies. (19/21/23/25) Only their color differs, but they truly are nothing but variations of the same spectrum, since they otherwise look alike and are interested in the same activities. Bruna blurs the main difference between the two rabbits as much as he teaches the distinction between one and two, all through the power of illustrations (the text playing hardly any role besides briefly narrating their ventures). The constant alternating between Miffy and Melanie is an elaborate play of colors within the games of the characters. White/brown twice followed by the inverted brown/white twice again, in *Miffy's Dream* (illustrations on the previous page), allows Bruna to toy one more time with teaching both distinction and symmetry. Looking at the images, the child can draw out the basics of geometry and colors as well as the deeper, underlying lesson on equality. This play on symmetry is even more radical and sophisticated in *Miffy and Melanie*, as the reader now observes an almost poetic form

of illustration. Indeed, the brown/white, white/brown, white/brown, brown/white wavering is like a visual representation of a quatrain enclosed rhyme scheme. The story spirals, reminiscent of the unfolding a kid's toy. The rhythm of the illustrations, along



with their alternating arrangement, awaken memories of origami fortune teller games, moving in steady, yet symmetrical movements and revealing their secrets to those who peek long enough.[86]

In this complex game that already is the reading of a picture book, why is having an anthropomorphic animal represent the child so important? As French professor Nathalie Prince points out, it is highly essential to notice that "the animal character leans more towards a childish universality than any human figure [would]. The animal seems strangely more child than the child himself." (94) Making use of two little bunnies gives Bruna a wider range of possibilities to play with the construction and deconstruction of differences. Having two human children of different colors would not have the same impact on the reader that the simplistic view of Miffy and Melanie's 'one, two, but the same' idea has. The detachment offered by the animal avatar allows for greater causes to be taught, since the lesson aims at children's subconscious – to treat the information – instead of exhibiting a direct confrontation that might shake them. Through this close, yet distant enough, mirroring of the child, the anthropomorphic animal represents a childish

[86] The origami fortune teller is a game where a player asks a question and the person operating the origami answers using an algorithm to manipulate the fortune teller's shape. It is consisted of folded paper marked with colors, numbers or actual words and has been highly popular among elementary school children in both Europe and the United States of America since the 1950s.
Image credit: http://hubpages.com/hub/How-to-Make-a-Paper-Cootie-Catcher

absolute, come to erase all differences of race, social background, etc.

Croque, croque, croque.
Il en mange une.
Il n'a plus faim.
Il se dit :
« Il fait si froid,
il neige si fort,
le petit cheval, mon voisin,
a sûrement faim.
Je vais porter l'autre carotte
chez lui. »

This can especially be seen in Paul François and Gerda Muller's *Les Bons Amis*, where a true chain of mutual aid is established within a group of animals belonging to different species and living in various places. In the book, each animal saves a bit of its own food to bring to its neighbor. It is a genuine hymn to friendship overcoming not only difficult times (the scarcity of food under the winter snow) but also physical differences and the fear of the 'Other' (or, by extension, of all that is foreign to us). (2/5/9/13/15-16)

Et c'est ainsi que,
du cheval au mouton,
du mouton au chevreuil,
la carotte revint au petit lapin gris.

Ah ! les bons, les bons amis !

In François's and Muller's story, "the door to each house opens on the intimacy of another, foreigner who [will] become familiar. The door opens, we [are] invited..." (Rolland 72) and we learn that the 'Other' is, after all, nothing but a

projection of oneself. Anthropomorphic stories are first and foremost "stories of great friendship that overcome the obstacle of difference" (Rolland 72). According to scholars of cognitive science Carolyn Burke and Joby Copenhaver, the lessons learned in early childhood are the most difficult to impair and the impact left by a story on the child reader can last a lifetime. According to them, it is vital to "stop thinking about children's books as child's play and acknowledge that the body of children's literature reflects contentious issues that reside at the core of our culture. Children deal with these issues seriously through their reading and learning." (210). In their illustrated – but also very literal – way François and Muller tell us that reading is crossing thresholds and that it might just be "the one true antidote that we possess against received ideas," adds Annie Rolland (202).

The place of illustrations within picture books for the very young is particularly important since it is the images that build the story as much as, or even more so than the text. "In the book the image illustrates a scene of the story within a space limited to the page, whereas it frees itself completely in the picture book, invading the text and competing with it in its narrative and didactic functions. [The image] no longer settles for illustrating, it completes, clarifies, explains, or brings a counterpoint."[87]

Now, what does it mean to see or look at an image? First of all, images cannot exist without the viewer's gaze. This gaze is actually "part of a movement of the imaginary. […] The visibility of the image […] entails both perception and imagination: it needs to be seen in order to appear, but it exceeds its visible aspect by inscribing itself in an imaginary relation with reality, which encourages an act of imagination," asserts

[87] "L'album, emblème de l'évolution du livre pour enfants." <http://classes.bnf.fr/rendezvous/pdf/albums.pdf>. 1. Web.

French philosopher François Noudelmann (7-8). There is intentionality within the act of illustration. As it has been seen with Dick Bruna's *Miffy* series for example, it is especially the case with picture books. Indeed, the genre is well known for its use of imaging in order to enlighten children both on themselves and on others, tackling trivial points such as counting, as well as preaching for a better world. In anthropomorphic tales the image is also particularly essential as it teaches children about their own bodies, through the mirroring effect and the work of imagination that follows. Image and imagination are intertwined in picture books. The act of mimesis projected by the illustrations actively participates in the recognition of and appropriation by the child of his/her own body. As Merleau-Ponty believed, the opening of the body towards the world finds its source within the gaze.[88] The child can see reflections of himself/herself within the anthropomorphic images and process the information they give him/her so that he/she can apply it – mostly subconsciously – to his/her own life. Imagination, "because it no longer really generates distance or discrepancy between reality and the image," is the bridge that produces knowledge. (Noudelmann 30) In children's picture books, "the world in the picture and the real world merge in the viewer," believe American and German scholars Bernd Huppauf and Christoph Wulf (80), and as such the image actually becomes a "narrative performance." (Huppauf and Wulf 217-8) There, the image is all-powerful and fashions itself as a true weapon of both understanding and criticizing.

So goes George Du Maurier's illustration, published in 1866, which is one of the very first examples of a story read by means of the image, its title ("The Tables Turned at

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[88] Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *L'Œil et l'esprit*. Paris : Gallimard, 1964 (1960). Print. 27

the Zoo") merely serving as the illustration to the image, if one may say so. The sketch represents animals with anthropomorphic features and characters, dressed as Victorian bourgeois, visiting a zoo behind the bars of which are men.

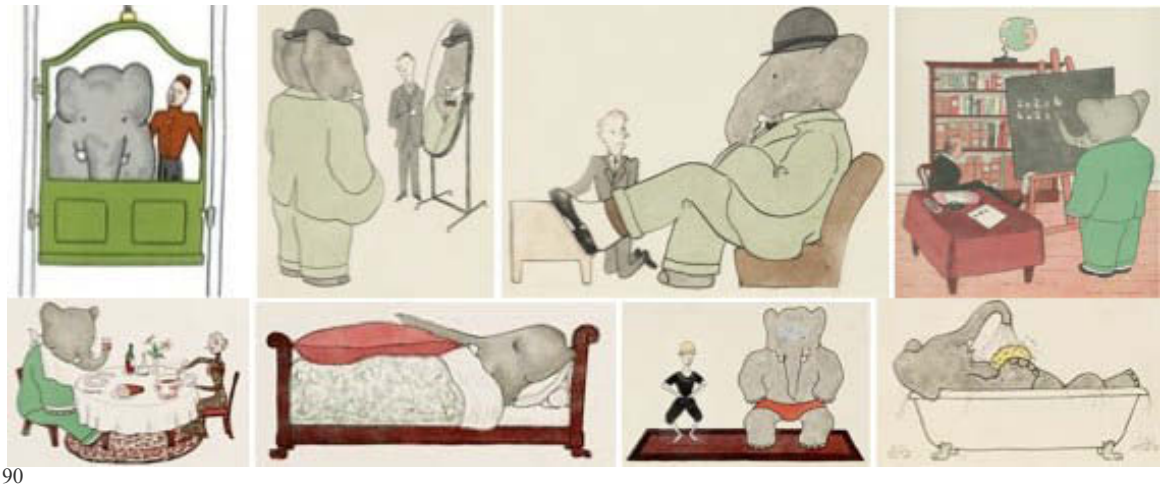
THE TABLES TURNED AT THE "ZOO."

The underlying message could not be clearer and does not require additional ranting. What Du Maurier presented is a perfect allegory of what the picture book for children aims at doing.[89] Indeed, to young children the text is but an accessory to the story. To them, only the image possesses the keys of the imaginary.

However, for the image to be a threshold to imaginary worlds, it needs to come to the mind of the illustrator first. And how does one draw the animal as a man, with all the confines it may bear? Let us go back to the famous *Babar*. Here, we have a rather big elephant – despite being miniaturized for the sake of the page and the story – acting like

[89] Du Maurier, George. "The Tables turned at the Zoo." *Punch* 52, 1866. Print.

he is as human as his human friends and colleagues are. Drawing an elephant driving a car with its flat hooves, snuggling in an armchair, wearing a tuxedo, riding an elevator or doing all kinds of other extraordinarily ordinary things, represent an actual constraint that only the suppleness of imagination can balance.



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Indeed, if inspiration is allowed to run wild, there are boundaries to the art of illustration in a picture book. The image, no matter how incredible in terms of its theme, has to answer to the child's needs for clear lines, bright colors and easiness of reading that are thoroughly enforced by the market of children's literature. French illustrator Johan Troianowski, who enjoys drawing with India ink and colored pencils, explained at the 2012 edition of the Salon du livre et de la presse de jeunesse in Montreuil, France: "Details are very important in the image. They need to be as realistic as possible, even in the world of endless possibilities that is the child's imaginary. It is the details that will help the little kid with deciphering the story and expressing his/her relationship to the world."[91]

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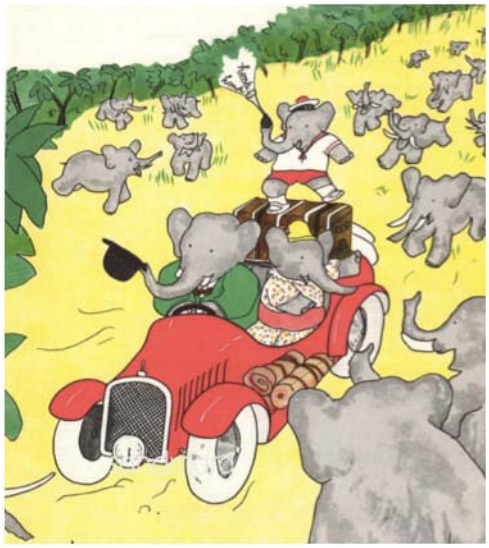
[90] De Brunhoff, Jean. *L'histoire de Babar, le petit éléphant*. Paris : L'École des loisirs, 1999 (1931). Print. 7/9-11/14

[91] Remarks gathered during a short private interview held at the Salon in Montreuil, on November 30th 2012. Courtesy of Johan Troianowski.

The anthropomorphic animal must answer to the same criteria and therefore can come up as more human than actual human characters would be on the page. It is this accumulation of sophisticated details that makes the animal a believable avatar of the child in the picture book, with, as a bonus, the natural touch of humor that having an elephant drive a car might spawn.[93]



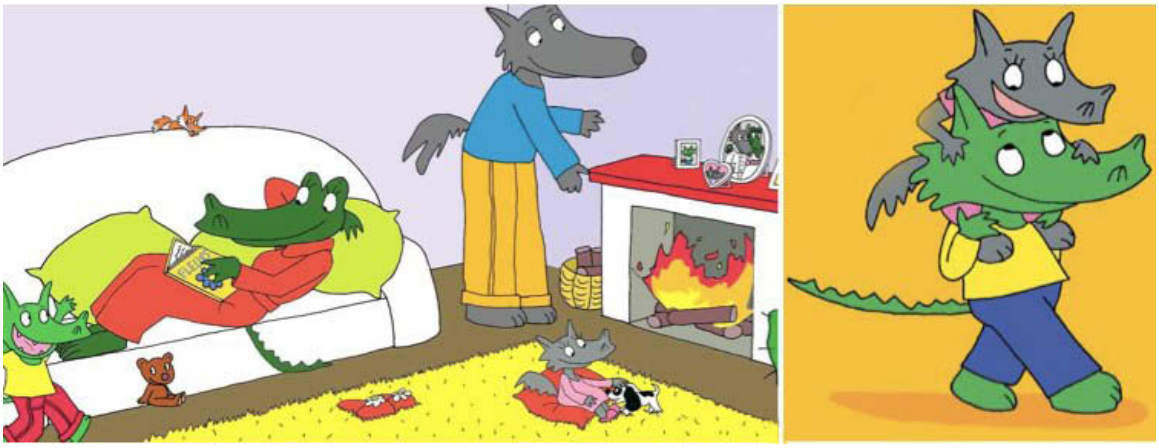
As Troianowski explained, "the image is the key, the true center of the story in picture books and it needs to be as explicit as possible, while still lifting the child towards the magic lands of storytelling and story-making."

The image creates the text and wants to be the true origin of the story intended for the young audience, whereas the exact opposite feeling occurs in adult readers who merely see the image as a "faire-valoir" (something that makes it look good) to the text, carrying

[92] Troïanowski, Johan. *Rouge (T02) : Le Carnaval aquatique*. Argenteuil : Makaka, 2010. Print. 5/11
[93] De Brunhoff, Jean. *L'histoire de Babar, le petit éléphant*. Paris : L'École des loisirs, 1999 (1931). Print. 20

precisions that can sometimes be seen as hindrance to the imaginary. According to Rolland, “the image is at the root of the creating act of the child in front of the reality of the world [because it] hands him with a precious tool for self representation within the world.” (23-24)

In *Crocolou*, Ophélie Texier's picture book series, the main character is a little boy of mixed race, half-crocodile half-wolf, who learns daily how to live with this double identity. He is green, with the snout and the tail of his crocodile mother, but has the ears of his wolf father, whereas Marilou, his little sister, is gray, with the ears and the tail of her father, but the snout of her mother. In a world where more and more children are born from interracial unions or are struggling to find their place within reconstituted families, it is vital for the child reader to be exposed to picture books such as *Crocolou*. The illustrations of Texier's series clearly show the child that from differences can be born beautiful things, if one is open and tolerant enough to acknowledge it. “To see is itself a creative operation,” said Henri Matisse and picture books, with the messages they hold, are the perfect example of that.[94]



Through images, children can live the situation in a much deeper way then if they

[94] Matisse, Henri. *Ecrits et propos sur l’art*. Paris : Hermann, 2000 (1972). Print. 321

only had access to the words of the story and thus can happily create new representations of themselves and of others, thanks to the free imagination generated by illustrations. “Drawings are as many imaginary representations of a part of the child's self,” maintains Annie Rolland. (33) This conjecture is all the more relevant since the work on the image itself is always centered on the young child's perspective. Indeed, picture books present the world at the target audience's level of height. The angle of the drawing is always measured according to the eye-level of the child reader, the anthropomorphic character becoming a double – true avatar – of the child, by proxy. The pioneer in terms of perspective in picture books for children was British writer Beatrix Potter who, with her young Peter Rabbit, gave back all their power to illustrations.

> The anthropomorphizing of the animal remains [...] ambiguous. It could be about making the animal into a man just like any other; yet it appears that the animal identifies itself to an other of the adult-man just as a child can be. Beatrix Potter's little rabbits are not images of humanity – for this there is McGregor [the gardener] – they are images of the child, and in this respect, little animals present the world at child's level, which was, incidentally, what Beatrix Potter herself said of her drawings, explaining why the rabbits and other Mister McGregor are drawn either from high-angles or low-angles, at level with short trousers, at medium level. (Prince 94)

The size of the character, as well as the view angle of the image, is essential to the identification of the child reader with the animal avatar. Observing a world where the scale is similar to the one that the child experiences daily allows him/her to better

assimilate the message of the picture book and to better adapt it to his/her life.

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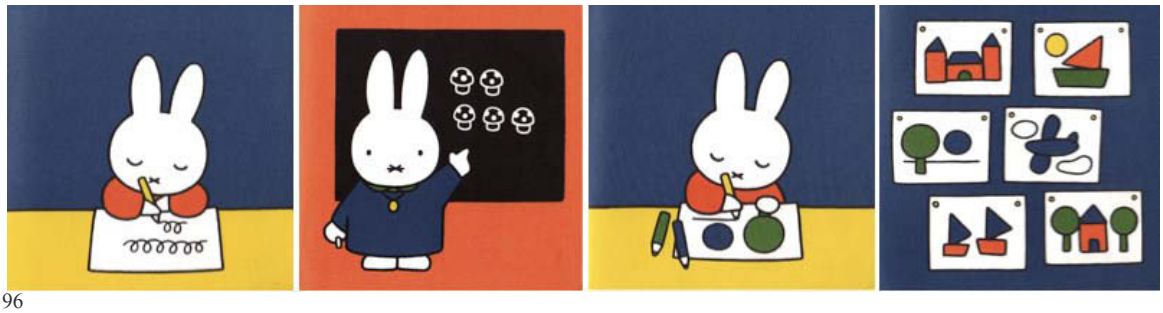
Naturally, this message, stemmed from picture books' illustrations, is designed for the target age of the child reader. Bruna's depiction of Miffy's day at kindergarten shows the simple, elementary lessons the child might acquire through gazing. Miffy draws a rough sketch of what will someday turn into letters, counts little mushrooms, and draws geometric figures in primary colors.



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"The nature of imagination is to change the scale of images, towards the small and mostly towards the big," claims philosopher Jean-Jacques Wunenberg (74). *Miffy at*

[95] Potter, Beatrix. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. London: Penguin Books, 2009 (1902). Print. 9-10/12/14/16/26
[96] Bruna, Dick. *Miffy at School*. London: Egmont UK Limited, 1997 (1984). Print. 11/13/21/23

School does precisely that. The images draw children's attention towards the miniature world of Miffy's everyday life so that it may give birth to the "big picture," namely the symmetry with their lives, what to expect of certain situations and how to react. This is exactly the intention of picture books: have the image evolve – within the space of the children's imagination and their reworkings of the "plot" – towards a wider message. Little Crocolou must learn to accept himself as he is, in spite of his physical differences, and children readers must also learn to love themselves as they are – both physically and psychologically – as well as extend the same courtesy to others. The image claims to be, at the heart of picture books, an extension of the malleable mind of the child.

Picture books are a source of various benefits for the child. In the first place, they comfort their target audience within the imaginary world of childhood, that is to say an enclosed world, with known boundaries, but also where everything is possible so long as one wishes it to be. Children hold the world in the palm of their hands when they read or are read a picture book. The picture book is an example of the minimal structure of completeness, feeding the child's desires to master and claim ownership. The particularity of picture books with anthropomorphic animals lies in the fact that it uses children's tendency to breathe life widely so that they may identify with them, safe from the dangers of an assimilation that would look too realistic and could traumatize rather than serve them. The animal plays the role of a mirror to the very young. "The animal is […] the other and the same, the other of the child and its same, sort of a mysterious and strange mirror in the service of a complex identification." (Prince 95)

The animal avatar offers a safe confrontation with the anxieties and/or the

unknown that children will one day have to face. Far from being extremely infantilizing or depreciating, the anthropomorphic presents real power to children readers. Despite it not being as much about children expressing themselves through the animal as it is about the adults' didactic tales of normalcy, it gives the readers an opportunity to confront their conception of themselves and of others. Just as Bettelheim had written about fairy tales, the picture book "provides what the child needs most: it begins exactly where the child is emotionally, shows him where he has to go, and how to do it. […It does so through] images which make it easy for him to comprehend what is essential for him to understand." (122) Picture books contribute to the development of children, their personal and social growth, while still offering them the imaginary escape specific to stories and necessary to balance the didactic aspects.

The pictured representation of the animal also helps feeding the prolific imagination of the young child, already predisposed to anthropomorphism.

> We find human faces in the moon, armies in the clouds; and by a natural propensity, if not corrected by experience and reflection, ascribe malice and good will to everything that hurts or pleases us. Hence the frequency and beauty of the *prosopopœia* in poetry, where trees, mountains, and streams are personified, and the inanimate parts of nature acquire sentiment and passion. And though these poetical figures and expressions gain not on the belief, they may serve, at least, to prove a certain tendency in the imagination, without which they could neither be beautiful nor natural. (Hume 48)

As Hume believed, imagination is a source of beauty and brings the comfort of a

plenary world. Anthropomorphism, thanks to the adventures lived by proxy, cultivates this imagination, as much for the pleasure of reading as to give the tools of a healthy growth to the child, at the heart of this key time that is the building of the self.

The animal figure in children's literature, whether or not it is anthropomorphic, both offers an escape from daily life and the rebuilding of it. The animal comes to quench the thirst for emancipation of young readers while still preserving the indispensable need to feel surrounded and to know the limits of – or even to impose some to, in order to feel reassured – their environment. James Matthew Barrie's "lost boys," if they are not strictly speaking anthropomorphic animals but genuine little boys dressed in animal skins, are nonetheless a fair example of it. They do embody a parenthesis from reality and claim themselves to be emblems of freedom and independence; yet, one cannot help but discern, within Peter Pan and his lost boys, the contours of a recreated miniature society, reminding the reader – just as picture books do – of the paradoxical need of the child for completeness inside the imaginary adventure.

From animal fur as second skin to the metamorphosis that fills older children's stories, there is but a very thin line. What authors of children's literature seem to tell us is that the animal, in each and every single one of its literary forms, is a true mirror of the child, his/her fears, his/her desires and his/her daily-life, and the otherness that adults may feel towards it.

Chapter 5:

"Who in the world am I?" [97] – The great puzzle of metamorphosis

Animals of all kinds inhabit the world of children's fiction. There, "our animal friends," as the familiar saying goes, are almost inevitably associated with the young readers. When it is not about animals being more humans than actual humans are – as is the case with anthropomorphic stories – it is about children transforming and putting on – sometimes literally – the skin of an animal. Heather Scutter, in her book *Displaced Fictions: Contemporary Australian Books for Teenagers and Young Adults*, defends that within children's literature of all nations can found such a closeness between children and animals that it appears as if there existed a natural affinity between the two. According to Scutter, this affinity reflects a "conflation of puritan and romantic ideologies at work: on the one hand, children are seen to be wild animals in need of taming, domestication and confinement and, on the other, children are seen to belong, with animals, to a gentle and uncorrupted natural world." (225) Tales of metamorphosis precisely exploit these two penchants, while also tackling the questions of escape and inner knowledge. When it comes to children's literature, in order to better grasp the stakes of metamorphosis and, on a more global scale, the idea of transformation, it is first essential to define these terms both in their literal and literary contexts.

The first edition (1694) of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* reads: "METAMORPHOSE. s. f. Changement d'une forme en une autre. On ne se sert de ce mot au propre qu'en parlant des changements d'une forme en une autre, que les anciens

[97] Carroll, Lewis. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and through the Looking-Glass. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992 (1865/71). Print. 15

Payens croyoient avoir esté faits par leurs Dieux. *La Metamorphose de Daphné en laurier. la pluspart des Metamorphoses cachent des sens allegoriques, soit pour la Physique, soit pour la Morale*.[98]"

Metamorphosis thus has represented the idea of a physical transformation from the very first attempts made to penetrate its essence. Nevertheless, its original association with a divine will also implies mental repercussions that are important to acknowledge. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, emblem of literary metamorphosis *par excellence*, are subjected to the Gods' games as well. Mythology shaped metamorphosis into a punishment or divine trickery. The definition found in the 9th, and most recent, edition of the Dictionnaire de l'Académie française, if more elaborated, is still imbued with this idea of fantastic intervention:

> MÉTAMORPHOSE, n. f. XIVe siècle. Emprunté, par l'intermédiaire du latin, du grec *metamorphôsis*, de même sens.
>
> 1. Changement de forme, de nature ou d'état qui, dans la légende ou les récits merveilleux, s'opère par quelque cause surnaturelle. *Les métamorphoses des génies et des fées*. Se dit notamment des transformations par lesquelles les dieux de la mythologie revêtent des apparences diverses aux yeux des mortels ou font passer l'un d'eux de sa forme naturelle à une autre. *Les métamorphoses de Zeus, de Protée. La métamorphose de Daphné en laurier*.[99]

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[98] "Metamorphosis: change from one form into another. One may only use this word in the literal sense when talking about changes from one form into another, which ancient Pagans believed to have been made by their Gods. *The Metamorphosis of Daphne into a laurel. Most Metamorphoses hide allegorical meanings, either regarding Physics or Morale*." <http://artflx.uchicago.edu.proxy3.library.jhu.edu/cgi-bin/dicos/pubdico1look.pl?strippedhw=m%C3%A9tamorphose>

[99] "Metamorphosis, 14th century. Borrowed, via Latin, from the Greek *metamorphôsis*, with the same meaning. 1. Change of form, nature or condition that, in legend or supernatural stories, operates from some

If today's treatment of literary metamorphosis retains all of its original symbolism, it also evidently addresses the notion of identity and its rather hazy contours. Literary metamorphosis evokes Julia Kristeva's abject as much as the reflection of the inner self one can find in Gregor Samsa – the main character of Franz Kafka's allegorical novella *The Metamorphosis* (1915) – via the deconstruction of genres present in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* (1928).

These approach angles are an essential part of the exploitation of the metamorphic theme in children's literature. Nevertheless said theme takes an even more considerable dimension in the light of the physical and psychological changes the growing child goes through, to what it seems to be an echo. The very nature of childhood is metamorphic, changing. Since it rests upon a tension between identity and form, literary metamorphosis comes to test both the limits of the literary character and that of common preconceptions on the self and the world.

"From a developmental perspective, childhood is usually depicted as a transitional state characterised by change and, as a result, the child is looked upon as someone who has a natural ability to accept and play with physical change," explains Finnish scholar Maria Lassén-Seger in a study entitled *Adventures Into Otherness: Child Metamorphs in Late Twentieth-Century Children's Literature* (173). The act of metamorphosis in children's literature is thus both tightly linked to what the character (and, by extension, the reader) was and what it could become. Physical changes are a dominant leitmotiv of children's literature. They can be at the heart of the story as much as what supports it

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preternatural cause. *The metamorphoses of genies and fairies.* Is notably said of transformations by which the gods of mythology assume a variety of appearances in the eyes of mortals or turn one of the latter from his/her natural form to some other. *The metamorphoses of Zeus, of Proteus. The metamorphosis of Daphne into a laurel."* <http://cnrtl.fr/definition/academie9/metamorphose>

structurally. The very idea of transformation fascinates because of the questions it raises about what makes the self and what distinguishes it from everything that is "other." As wrote Leonard Barkan: "metamorphosis is a question mark, an experience outside the realm of real life that has nonetheless persistently captured the human imagination." (1986 17) This is why it can be found in stories aimed at children (beginner and independent readers aged about 6 to 11) older than the ones targeted in anthropomorphic pictures books.

With children's literature – as with its so-called grown-up counterpart – animality first evoked risk and punishment. Metamorphosis will often be temporary and following the failure to respect an interdiction. The figure of the donkey is a classic of this punitive metamorphosis. Bottom especially comes to mind, suffering the consequences of his lack of culture and grotesque actor performance, in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and so does Lucius who falls under the yoke of his curiosity and the methods he deployed to satiate it in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*.

In the same vein, Pinocchio, Carlo Collodi's illustrious character is also morphed into a donkey for his lack of discipline and obedience. While the Marionette is headed to the "Land of Toys," a donkey warns both Pinocchio and his readers: "Remember, little simpleton! Boys who stop studying and turn their backs upon books and schools and teachers in order to give all their time to nonsense and pleasure, sooner or later come to grief. Oh, how well I know this! How well I can prove it to you! A day will come when you will weep bitterly, even as I am weeping now—but it will be too late!"[100] The idea –

[100] *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, Project Gutenberg. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/500/500-h/500-h.htm> chapter 31. English translation by Carol Della Chiesa.

in a most unflattering and humiliating way – is to punish the child for transgressing the norm of moral values society imposes. And the Dormouse to drive it further, as Pinocchio wakes up to brand new donkey ears and the "donkey fever:" "Fate has decreed that all lazy boys who come to hate books and schools and teachers and spend all their days with toys and games must sooner or later turn into donkeys."[101] The English translation talks about fate, when the French uses the word "scientifiquement" (scientifically) and the original Italian's decree is that of wisdom ("sapienza"). The French's take on science in its translation is particularly interesting when one considers the fact that literary metamorphosis finds its origins within the universe of mythology. British scholar John Rowe Townsend wrote, in *Written for Children*, that metamorphosis can be considered as a "perilous imaginative leap into the animal mind;" (88) yet, one cannot help but notice that the very lexicon attributed to it seems to betray such idea. Indeed, when Pinocchio is transformed into an animal, the change is rationalized as an exertion of wisdom or scientific phenomenon, a mere equivalent to the natural evolution that, for example, the caterpillar's body endures in order to become a butterfly.

Obviously, it is nothing but a didactic ruse aiming at trapping the young reader into walking a path assessed as being morally acceptable by the society in which he/she evolves. Further to which the poor metamorphosed protagonist repents and conquers his return to humanity through a demonstration of good deeds and humility. "If only my misfortune might serve as a lesson to disobedient boys who refuse to study!" [102] adds Pinocchio.

[101] Op.cit. chapter 32
[102] Op.cit. chapter 33

In its origins, metamorphosis in children's literature thus had a purely didactic intent, trying to scare the children readers into making them behave "properly" and, if they were to deviate, to teach them the benefits of a sincere repentance. From this association between metamorphosis and punishment ensues the idea that the animal is an inferior being to the man and that the child is closer to the animal since, in a beast-like way, he/she must be trained – or tamed – to escape an initial status of little savage. Not forgetting that, in the manner of multiple narrations on hybridity, the correlation child-animal created by metamorphosis in children's literature also brings back to memory the Romantic idea of the child being closer to the natural world, because of his/her innocence. Looking at the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy's definition of this literary movement, one cannot help but notice that the tight relationship between childhood, nature and innocence is clearly established as one of the pillars of faiths in the early 19th century, both in Europe and in the United States of America (where Transcendentalism echoes it). "The spontaneous innocence of the child (and of humanity in its childhood state) is corrupted from the beginning of the intellectual separation from nature; nevertheless, the individual – and by association human history – can overcome this separation through a spiral process in order to regain this lost unity, purified and enriched by the traveled distance," reads the dictionary's entry. It appears evident here that literary metamorphosis is first and foremost the reflection of an adult preoccupation. By bringing closer the child and the animal, it would seem that adults, tinged with nostalgia, are looking for a way back to a past they believe to be Edenic. While the very notion of the child as a being in its own right is still relatively new, the beginning of the historical and social construction of childhood clearly starts to take its place in the early 19th century.

As far as literary metamorphosis is concerned, this brand new conception of childhood leads to a turning point. As British novelist Marina Warner explains in *Six Myths of Our Time: Little Angels, Little Monsters, Beautiful Beasts, and More*, metamorphosis in children's literature henceforth implies ideas of pleasure and redemption rather than shame and degeneration. As Warner maintains, from the expression of a human decline, bestiality has evolved into an appealing alternative: "metamorphosis out of human shape into another, beastly form used to express a fall from human grace. […] Beastly shape is now becoming an appealing alternative [to the everyday life]." (72-4) Only with the return to the natural, and consequently the animal, can one rediscover the lost innocence of childhood, or so narratives of metamorphosis seem to say. From these same perspectives were born stories of hybridity in children's literature, also halfway between monstrosity, or identity loss, and the development of a deep affect between childhood and Nature. This new angle of approaching literary metamorphosis, and hybridity – as will be discussed in more details in the next chapter, – perceives animality as a way-out of the human world and its deviances. In these new stories, the natural state, established as purer, opens the way to a reinvented fortune; which is also the case with hybrid narratives.

Literary metamorphosis, as an escape route, wishes to be a synonym of an increased freedom, a liberation with animal features. It implies, according to South African professor Thomas van der Walt, an "unsettling blurring of the child's identity [while at the same time being] a pleasurable experience away from adult restrictions [and] portraying an appealing alternative to being a human child raised and governed by adult authority." (39) In such scenarios, the innocent child protagonist is a victim of adult

impurity, and finds, inside the animal skin, strength and both a physical and mental way of escape. Animality, through metamorphosis, would thus transcend the tight relationship between child and Nature, and transform the state of all-weakness of the child.

The idea of the victim child trying to run away is of course not a new one. The first traces of it can be found in popular tales and fairytales. Charles Perrault's *Peau d'Âne* (1694), notably, seems to have a very particular resonance with the concept of metamorphosis as a synonym of temporary liberation. Trying to flee a father whose intentions are incestuous, the young heroine finds salvation under the animal disguise she dons. "Que faites-vous, ma fille ? [lui dit sa marraine] en voyant la princesse arrachant ses cheveux et meurtrissant ses belles joues ; voici le moment le plus heureux de votre vie. Enveloppez-vous de cette peau [d'âne], sortez de ce palais et allez tant que la terre pourra vous porter : lorsqu'on sacrifie tout à la vertu, les dieux savent vous récompenser." (103)[103] This analogy between animal and virtue, even though it is drawn via a repulsive external appearance – the words "sale" (dirty), "dégoutante" (disgusting) and "effroyable" (gruesome) are used in a recurrent pattern – is essential. (105-12) Indeed, the image of the young girl trying to escape unhealthy paternal relations under the cloak of animality has become a literary topos, and it therefore does not come as a surprise that it can still be abundantly found in children's literature today. If in Perrault's tale it is only a disguise, in modern declinations of the topos, actual metamorphosis is willingly exploited.

Lynne Reid Banks's novel *Melusine: A Mystery*, inspired by the legendary eponymous character of folktales from the Middle Ages is a perfect example of that. The

[103] "What are you doing, my child? [her Godmother] asked, seeing the Princess tearing her hair, her beautiful cheeks stained with tears. This is the most happy moment of your life. Wrap yourself in this [donkey] skin, leave the palace, and walk so long as you can find ground to carry you: when one sacrifices everything to virtue the gods know how to mete out reward." (Translation: Robert Samber and J. E. Mansion. Project Gutenberg 2009 (1922). Ebook)

story is told from the point of view of Roger, a twelve-year-old British boy come to spend his summer in France in the derelict castle turned bed-and-breakfast of the Serpe family. The atmosphere that reigns over there is more than disturbing: the rooms that are not already in ruin are infested by flies, Mr. Serpe, the owner, is described as a gloomy, cold and threatening man; as for his daughter, Melusine, who is the same age as Roger, she is described as a strange and shy child with a reptilian appearance (small eyes, barely there lips, cold skin and drawling gait). As the two children start developing a friendship, Roger feels Melusine's presence several times in his room in the middle of the night, only to discover one evening with horror that it is a giant snake. The story goes on and Roger refuses to sleep in his room out of fear that he will have to face the monstrous nature of his young friend. Nevertheless, the young boys starts to feel the unease that weighs upon Mr. Serpe and his daughter after he gets to witness scenes of cuddling that seem rather unnatural. The unhealthy ambience increases and is reflected upon the castle's facade which visibly deteriorates as Roger and his parents start to grow aware of the abuse Melusine has to suffer from her father. Despite his initial repulsion, the essence of Melusine that seems to emanate from the animal manages to reassure the young boy and to coerce him into tolerating the metamorphed body of his friend. He understands that the true horror does not come from her transformation but what caused it. "Poor Melusine! he thought. Poor, poor thing! And he understood why he had no more fear of her, or even of the creature she sometimes was. The fear had just got lost in pity." (99) The despicable aspect of metamorphosis, though it serves here the forwarding of the plot, is mainly a way for Banks to explore the psychological repercussions of sexual aggression upon the child. Indeed, according to scholar Brenda O. Daly, the act of donning an alternative

identity can be, within the narrative, a powerful trope to represent self-hatred in the ill-treated character, as well as their desire to escape their own body.[104] It is therefore not surprising that metamorphosis serves as a metaphor of sexual abuse in children's literature, where the theme still remains relatively taboo and difficult to tackle. The very fact that Melusine's story is reported indirectly, through Roger, shows the reluctance that subsists at the idea of confronting the child reader to the traumatizing identification process an autodiegetic narrative might produce. Metamorphosis is used as a detour in the light of this discomfort that still surrounds the approach of incest in children's literature. American professor Kimberly Reynolds supports the hypothesis of the necessity for abuse victims to dissociate from their body, if only through fiction or the imaginary, since she writes, in *Frightening Fiction*, that one of the main symptoms associated with victims of incest is their tendency to isolate themselves and to create substitute personalities in order to overcome their trauma. (17) Nevertheless, if, in children's literature, it is a matter of reproducing the psychological consequences of physical abuse, metamorphosis still remains, within these narratives, a source of power over the offenders – come to counteract the here exacerbated all-weakness of the child. Indeed, Melusine's transformation into a snake and her nocturnal visits to Roger are a cry for help, giving the readers – children and adults alike – hints of what the signs of abuse can be so that they may detect them, if and when confronted to a similar situation. Not to mention that, in Banks's novel, only Melusine morphed into a snake can rescue Roger's young sister from certain drowning. (73-9)

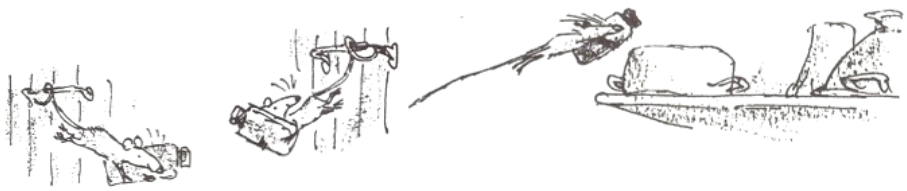
[104] Daly, Brenda O. "Father-Daughter Incest in Hadley Irwin's Abby, My Love: Repairing the Effects of Childhood Sexual Abuse during the Adolescent Years." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 17: 3 (1992). Print. 6

Metamorphosis in literature for the young often intervenes at the heart of stories where the avatars of authority display violence and cruelty upon weaker people – usually children. In such narratives, metamorphosis is mainly a way to retaliate and/or to protect oneself. It allows the child to escape the sentiment of helpless dependence he or she might feel towards adults when it comes to the prodigality of care and the satisfaction of practical needs. Metamorphosis is a compensation that gives power to children and dissipates the shadows that surround them. Animal life, though it implies a blurring of the child's identity, can nevertheless reveal to be a powerful weapon of understanding, as well as of liberation and freedom.

This is also the case in Roald Dahl's *The Witches* where the young protagonist, a seven-year-old orphan, can be seen metamorphed into a mouse, for having spied upon the secret committee of England's witches. The transformation thus starts as a punishment, in agreement with the “tradition” of literary metamorphosis, to later evolve towards a rather ambiguous positivity. Many of Dahl's novels tell stories of adults abusing their authority upon the younger ones. As was the case in Banks's book, metamorphosis here is an open window to new possibilities and a wider room for maneuver for the child. The young hero of *The Witches* is spending his vacation in Bournemouth, a small seaside town south east of England, when he accidentally falls upon the annual convention of witches from the United Kingdom. Caught spying with the hope of discovering the secret residence of the Grand High Witch and of thwarting her plans to exterminate all children of the world, the boy is changed into a mouse, along with Bruno Jenkins, a young boy whose stomach – more developed than his brain, or so the narrator implies, – had unfortunately lured him inside the witches' nest.

If this might seem slightly traumatizing – given the fact that the transformation is of course irreversible – metamorphosis is still the only solution to eradicate the magical vermin that is eating Britain away. Indeed, only his newly transformed body can allow the young hero to poison the witches with their own potion, Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-Maker, which the evil women had hoped to inject in all the candy sold to children. It is of course necessary to specify that metamorphosis has not incapacitated either child, who can both think or talk just like they used to. (132)

Thanks to his new mouse body, the young protagonist can sneak in the Grand High Witch's bedroom unnoticed and steal the potion, so that he may pour it – in spite of the imminent danger that being a rodent inside of the hotel's kitchen might present – in the soup intended for the convention's attendees.



"In another few seconds, all the witches had completely disappeared and the tops of the two long tables were swarming with small brown mice." (186) The metamorphosis into an animal does give him a power he did not possess before the transformation and that is how the evil ends up being eradicated. It is also quite amusing to reflect upon the fact that this freshly acquired strength was born from the transformation in one of the weakest animals there is, the mouse.

Yet, as Thomas van der Walt emphasizes in *Change and Renewal in Children's Literature*, the most interesting consequence that the metamorphosis has upon the child's mouse-body is that, in truth, the magical transformation is the only way for the character

to experience the "reconstruction of a healthy family unit," contrary to the fate that awaited Kafka's Samsa. (138) As a little boy, he was subjected to the witches' violence and his own fear of abandonment. As a mouse, he can vanquish evil and conquer his uncertainties. Indeed, if the reader is aware that the protagonist is an orphan, we learn later in the story that his parents were killed in a violent car accident he was the only one to survive. "I won't go into the horrors of that terrible afternoon. I still get the shivers when I think about it," he says. (13) The day when his grandmother, the only family member he has left, catches pneumonia, the fears of death and solitude awaken within him. The metamorphosis into a mouse has a magical dimension since it allows the dissolution of his trauma.

> "A mouse-person will almost certainly live for three times as long as an ordinary mouse," my grandmother said. "About nine years."
>
> "Good!" I cried. "That's great! It's the best news I've ever had!"
>
> "Why do you say that?" she asked, surprised.
>
> "Because I would never want to live longer than you," I said. "I couldn't stand being looked after by anybody else." […]
>
> "How old are *you*, Grandmamma?" I asked.
>
> "I'm eighty-six," she said.
>
> "Will you live another eight or nine years?"
>
> "I might," she said. "With a bit of luck."
>
> "You've got to," I said. "Because by then I'll be a very old mouse and you'll be a very old grand-mother and soon after that we'll both die together."

"That would be perfect," she said. (195-6)

Although the end of the novel might come as a bit of a shock to an adult reader, it makes perfect sense to a younger one. What matters is neither one's corporeal aspect nor life expectancy but being surrounded by people who love you. "My darling," said [Grandmamma] at last, "are you sure you don't mind being a mouse for the rest of your life?" "I don't mind at all," I said. "It doesn't matter who you are or what you look like so long as somebody loves you." (197) Metamorphosis allows the resolving of conflicts, both inside and out, which Dahl's story strikingly exemplifies.

It is nonetheless interesting to have a closer look at the power engendered by metamorphosis. If the animal becomes a figure of power and self-defense in front of adults, does that mean that the child is openly perceived as a weak and incompetent being? The most perplexing idea might actually be the implication that only through metamorphosis – only in becoming "other" than child – are the main characters able to reach a certain ascendency over their enemies, as professor Roger D. Sell also esteems in *Children's Literature as Communication*. In these stories, Sell writes,

> a "child" is somebody weak, naïve, undisciplined and lacking control, whereas the contrasting traits of strength, power, suspicious cunning, and masterfulness are set up as the ideal characteristics. In other words, the ideal child is *not* to be a child at all, or at least, not a child as children are defined in these narratives. (175)

Stories of metamorphosis in children's literature would then appear to convey that, only in becoming "other," can the others that children already are overstep their status of dependency and helplessness to protect themselves from adult brutality. This analysis, though indubitable, nonetheless remains rather reductive. Indeed, metamorphosis is a means of countering the position of inherent victim of the child, but it is also a symbolism of self-acceptance and seems to function as an escape from grown-up life as well. There is in metamorphosis a touch of the Peter Pan syndrome. If Peter finds refuge in a world that is purely imaginary, Roald Dahl's character, as for him, finds his haven within his animal-morphed body. The young protagonist, once changed into a mouse, no longer has to worry about school, work, or responsibilities. He can, in a way, remain a child forever since he has been freed of all potential adult duties. Not to forget that his condition now requires the care of his grandmother for his entire life. Here, metamorphosis is slightly ambiguous as, if it is a source of a power superior to what the character possessed as a human child, it is also the source of life dependency, turning a temporary victim into an eternal martyr, if one may say so.

This scenario of regressive desire is so close to Barrie's vision that American scholar Alison Lurie's analysis of Peter Pan in *Don't Tell the Grown-Ups: The Subversive Power of Children's Literature*, can easily be applied to *The Witches*: "[the novel represents] an elaborate dream fulfillment of intense but contradictory childhood wishes – to be grown up at once and never to be grown up; to have exciting adventures and be perfectly safe; to escape from your mother and have her always at hand." (131) Dahl, following in the footsteps of J.M. Barrie, thus addresses both the child's fear of abandonment and adults' anxiety at having left their childhood behind. Nevertheless, this

idea of escape or "power over"[105] is relatively limited since it is unfortunately often a question of a temporary access to power only – including in Dahl's novel where the young character earns along the way an entire life of integral dependency. It is generally more a matter of escaping problems than of finding them a long-term tangible solution.

Nonetheless, if this regressive tendency of metamorphoses – such as that of *The Witches* – is undeniable, I would not for all that conclude, as does Lassén-Seger in *Adventures into Otherness*, that they can be summarized as a "stag[ing of] reassuring fantasies of an eternal childhood." (261) If one has a closer look at Dahl's stories, as well as at characters such as Lewis Carroll's Alice or the dæmons of the trilogy *His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman, one can see that metamorphosis knows a variety of subtle nuances of escape, access to power, reflections on the body and guidance for self-acceptance.

" "Curiouser and curiouser!" cried Alice (she was so much surprised, that for the moment she quite forgot how to speak good English). "Now I'm opening out like the largest telescope that ever was! Good-bye, feet!" (for when she looked down at her feet, they seemed to be almost out of sight, they were getting so far off)." (13) This excerpt describes the very first height metamorphosis undergone by Alice within the novel. Beyond all metaphorical implications related to change, it is first and foremost a question of resolving minor difficulties, in an entirely temporary setting. From shrinking enough to go through a keyhole – in order to keep pursuing the white rabbit – to trying to retrieve

[105] "Power over:" the notion that animal metamorphosis is a source of temporary control over an assailant (usually adult); in opposition to "power to," or the power to adjust and make things evolve towards a lasting positivity. See: Lassén-Seger, Maria. *Adventures Into Otherness: Child Metamorphs in Late Twentieth-Century Children's Literature.* Turku: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2006. Print. 101

her true size – which she deems adequate enough to roam around Wonderland without needing anyone's help, – via shortening again to avoid a certain death – as she finds herself stuck in the white rabbit's house, to which Bill the Lizard is about to set fire in order to free the place from the "monster," – the metamorphoses endured by Alice are first concrete solutions to immediate problems.

Metamorphosis does allow the plot to unfold; yet Lewis Carroll also wished for it to be a reflection of the changing body of the growing child. The novel has barely started when Alice starts growing excessively, after having ingested some cake: "Dear, dear! How queer everything is to-day! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've changed in the night? Let me think: *was* I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is 'Who in the world am I?' Ah, *that's* the great puzzle!" (15) The simple act of growing – immoderately, true, but without the metamorphosis entailing a change of species – bothers Alice so that she wonders about her identity, going as far as reviewing the corporeal aspect of all the little girls her age she has ever met, in case she could recognize herself within any of them. The anxiety she expresses on several occasions – "Still she went on growing, and, as a last resource, she put one arm out of the window, and one foot up the chimney, and said to herself "Now I can do no more, whatever happens. What *will* become of me?"" (28) – is as much related to the childish fear of change and the unknown as it is to the very adult worry of seeing a part of themselves die as they leave childhood behind in order to enter the world of

responsibilities. Many a novel for children displays this grown-up melancholy towards the lost imaginary worlds that used to populate their youth. J.M. Barrie thus wrote of Neverland: “On these magic shores children at play are for ever beaching their coracles. We too have been there; we can still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more.” (14)

Plenty of narratives for children do echo their author's regrets, metamorphosis being no exception, yet the latter has the advantage of uniting the child's perspective with that of the adult. Indeed, what better way to express the anguish of changing felt by the child than to illustrate it in the most manifest way there is? “Growing up and becoming a member of society is one of the most important things likely to be negotiated within children's literature, and we might as well expect stories involving metamorphosis to have a particular relevance here.” (Sell 159)

Certainly, “the very nature of childhood is metamorphic,” writes author/illustrator for the young Natalie Babbitt. (588) Children undergo, as they journey towards adolescence and adulthood, multiple physical and mental transformations. They try to figure out who they are and redefine themselves *ad infinitum*, their physical appearance and perception of it playing a major role in this evolution. The case of Alice, which is no exception, is a particularly rich source on the subject. As a true canon of fiction for the young, *Alice in Wonderland* is of capital importance when it comes to the outlook on the metamorphic nature of the child, not only in the messages it conveys but also in the high influence it still has today on new publications for children, in all nations.

Through his young character, Lewis Carroll addresses what Jacques Lacan would later call the idea of *méconnaissance* (false recognition). Alice observes herself through

these changes and recognizes herself badly, if at all. Lacan explains that, in the mirror stage, the image young children perceive out of their own reflection does not correspond to the physical reality of what they are experiencing. The "recognition" by children of their image is actually an example of *méconnaissance*. Throughout their entire lives, Lacan argues, individuals will maintain an impression of singularity and autonomy thanks to a constant *méconnaissance* of the real conditions of their existences – especially because of the fact that their existences depend on others and on a certain cultural symbolism. And so Alice does not cease to ponder over her identity as she faces an image that no longer reflects the original recognition (or *méconnaissance*) she had of herself. Her encounter with the Caterpillar is the ultimate embodiment of this reflection, and Tenniel's original illustration shows how small the young girl suddenly feels, her eyes haunted by such queries:

> "Who are *you*?" said the Caterpillar.
>
> This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, "I—I hardly know, Sir, just at present – at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."

> "What do you mean by that?" said the Caterpillar, sternly. "Explain yourself!"

"I ca'n't explain *myself*, I'm afraid, Sir," said Alice, "because I'm not myself, you see."

"I don't see," said the Caterpillar.

"I'm afraid I ca'n't put it more clearly," Alice replied, very politely, "for I ca'n't understand it myself, to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing."

"It isn't," said the Caterpillar.

"Well, perhaps you haven't found it so yet," said Alice; "but when you have to turn into a chrysalis – you will some day, you know – and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you'll feel it a little queer, wo'n't you?"

"Not a bit," said the Caterpillar.

"Well, perhaps *your* feelings may be different," said Alice: "all I know is, it would feel very queer to *me*." (35-6)

Alice's dysmorphic body, as British scholar Lois Drawmer calls it in her contribution to the collection *Monsters and Monstrous: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*, is nothing but an allegory of the physical transformations and psychological interrogations that accompany the odyssey towards adulthood. In mirroring Alice's feeling of strangeness as her body changes, Carroll questions both his and the readers' notion of identity. What are we? And what makes what we are exactly, in a universe where we can never really be the same from one second to the next? Carroll seems to be echoing Heraclitus's sentiment that "no man ever steps in the same river twice, for it is not the same river and he is not the same man." (116)

Moreover, it is interesting to note that, in Alice's case, metamorphosis inevitably happens through food ingestion. Naturally, it represents the fact that nutritional intake makes the child grow, and by extension change, but the symbolic implication of the child's budding sexuality is also undeniable. The intrusion of a foreign body within is synonymous of change. Children approaching their future sexuality are no longer entirely children.

The multiple metamorphoses suffered by Alice throughout the novel thus present several variations: the resolving of immediate problems, the expression of the child's anxieties in the face of the uncertainties the future may hold, the traces of an adult melancholy for a world of infinite possible that is lost forever, and a philosophical interrogation on the human being and its image of itself. However, if the question of strangeness of oneself is brilliantly raised by Carroll, he does not seem to want to offer an answer to it, settling for a contemplation of the phenomenon and – like Alice – adjusting to it, as a natural and necessary fact. The quest for identity undertaken by Alice allows her to accept herself the way she is, despite all the disruptions endured by her body. To the point where a blasé Alice expresses her disinterest for the final result of her appearance, simply stressing her fatigue of the interminable changes to the Caterpillar: “Oh, I’m not particular as to size, ” Alice hastily replied; “only one doesn’t like changing so often, you know.” (41)

The quest for identity takes an analogous dimension in British writer Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*. Indeed, the author also exploits the trope of metamorphosis in order to illustrate the child's turbulent crossing to adulthood and to reflect upon the reasons behind such a fatality. Nevertheless, Pullman plays the animal

card on two different levels. Metamorphosis, naturally, but also hybridity, since the animals, that can willingly and endlessly transform during their youth, are the external projections of the soul of the human children to whom they are attached. Indeed, in Lyra's (the young heroine) world, the deep ego (*moi profond*) of each human being has an animal-shaped physical manifestation called dæmon. It has its own identity, despite the fact that it is an integral part of the human of whom it is the projection. They make a single entity, under the form of two separate bodies. The novel states that all humans, in all universes, possess dæmons, but that they only take an external form in a few of these. Dæmons are gifted with intelligence and are able to talk.

What is particularly interesting is the fact that a child's dæmon has no set shape and can, in the blink of an eye, transform into the animal of its choice, real or fantastic, depending on circumstances or the combined desires of its human and itself. This endless ability to morph, with no form restriction, is notably captivating when one takes into account that most of the transformations that happen are tightly linked to the emotional state of the human to whom the dæmon belongs. So, as Lyra is about to meet John Faa, the King of the Gypsies, Pantalaimon, her dæmon, morphs into a panther to protect her and soothe her fears: “And then Lyra began to feel truly nervous. She kept close to Ma Costa, and Pantalaimon became as big as he could and took his panther shape to reassure her.” (1:101) Several paragraphs later, as Lyra feels embarrassed by the high praise the King of Gypsies gives her, Pantalaimon changes form again, reflecting the best he can the wish of his human to disappear into the ground: “Lyra felt a blush from the roots of her hair to the soles of her feet; Pantalaimon became a brown moth to hide.” (1:102) Following this he will try his hand (or paw), in one single night, at shapes of a sparrow,

to express curiosity: “Pantalaimon was a sparrow now, and sat curiously on Lyra’s shoulder, his claws deep in the wolfskin coat,” (1:104) and of a wild cat, when all the eyes fall upon Lyra: “Knowing that everyone still in the hall was staring at her, and conscious of those thousand sovereigns she was suddenly worth, she blushed and hesitated. Pantalaimon darted to her breast and became a wildcat, sitting up in her arms and hissing softly as he looked around.” (1: 104) A few chapters before, the reader had also seen him be an arctic fox, just for the sake of sensation. (1: 191)

All in all, the first book of the trilogy shows Pantalaimon adopting a total of thirty-eight different shapes. Dæmons’ metamorphoses in Pullman’s novels clearly mirror the instability of a growing child’s personality. They serve as metaphors of change and evolution, as well as of the different phases children or teenagers go through as years go by. Metamorphosis also strives at being an echo of the drastic, sometimes violent, physical transformations they suffer (puberty’s torments, notably), as well as of the amusement that can be had when one tries its hand at being a variety of different people.

If dæmons are the incarnation of the human soul in Lyra’s world, and go through all the questionings and variations attributed to youth, they cannot escape either what the narrator calls “settlement,” that is the taking of a definitive form. This takes place around adolescence – to be as fair a mirroring of the transformations felt by the reader as possible – and is meant to be an avatar of the human character’s personality. For example, in the first novel of the trilogy, the audience learns that all the servants have a dog dæmon, as a symbol for loyalty and obedience: “As Lyra held her breath, she saw the servant’s dæmon (a dog, like all servants’ dæmons) trot and sit quietly at his feet” (1: 5). Witches’ dæmons invariably take the shape of a bird, “ “Does that mean we shall be

birds, like witches' dæmons?" said Pantalaimon" (3: 424), as a reminder of their power to fly as well as their tendency to travel in groups, like a migratory bird flock. And all the soldiers are flanked by wolves dæmons, to reflect their ferocity along with their respect of hierarchy: "Lyra had never heard it before, but she knew it at once: it was the howl of the Tartar guards' wolf dæmons." (1: 252)

Like all changes, the "settlement" is a synonym of the unknown but also of responsibilities and of a loss of choices, which naturally scares Lyra. The young girl openly wonders about the reasons behind this ineluctable fatality and shares her worries with an old seaman during their journey to free the children kidnapped by "gobblers":

> "Why do dæmons have to settle?" Lyra said. "I want Pantalaimon to be able to change forever. So does he."
>
> "Ah, they always have settled, and they always will. That's part of growing up. There'll come a time when you'll be tired of his changing about, and you'll want a settled kind of form for him."
>
> "I never will!"
>
> "Oh, you will. You'll want to grow up like all the other girls. Anyway, there's compensations for a settled form."
>
> "What are they?"
>
> "Knowing what kind of person you are. Take old Belisaria[, my dæmon]. She's a seagull, and that means I'm a kind of seagull too. I'm not grand and splendid nor beautiful, but I'm a tough old thing and I can

> survive anywhere and always find a bit of food and company. That's worth knowing, that is. And when your dæmon settles, you'll know the sort of person you are." (1: 146-7)

Here the old sailor gives a very down-to-earth explanation of what "settling" feels like, yet tinged with nostalgia – towards a time when no one needed compensations and when fatigue was not a good enough reason to give up, – and of an aspect of society readers will identify with – that is the irrepressible need to be and do as everyone else, also known as desire for social identity. According to British psychologists Henri Tajfel et John Turner, social identity is a vital condition to the procurement of the feeling of self-esteem, thanks to the notion of belonging offered by the group. Not being a part of what Tajfel and Turner have called the " in-groups" (which are majority groups invested with some kind of authority) will ultimately lead to rejection and discrimination from the individual's peers.[106] Lyra – and by extension all her young readers – will one day wish not to stand out from the social norm that surrounds her and will yield to the subconscious pressure of the group. In an interview given by the author of the trilogy, he incidentally explained about the previous excerpt and the idea of "settlement" in general that:

> one very important thing [in the novel] is that children's dæmons can change shape, whereas they gradually lose the power to change during adolescence, and adults' daemons have one fixed animal shape which they keep for the rest of their lives. The daemon, and especially the way it

[106] For further references, please see: Tajfel, Henri, and John Turner. "The social identity theory of intergroup behavior." *Psychology of intergroup relations*. Eds. Worchel, S., and W. Austin. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1986. Print. 7-24

> grows and develops with its person, expresses a truth about human nature which would have been hard to show so vividly otherwise. I found that [metamorphoses and the taking of a definitive form were] a very good way of demonstrating the difference between children and grown-ups, between innocence and experience – the sort of infinite potentiality children have, the great malleability of their characters. They change very quickly, their moods change.

It is this porous and malleable aspect of childhood that seems to fascinate authors of fiction for the young. Here, the dæmon is used – the way metamorphosis is in many a narrative – as a symbol, a banner of the multitude of changes undergone by the child. It also describes children as beings having the ability to redefine themselves endlessly, always on the lookout for new adventures and sensations, which their very malleable nature grants them. But the dæmon also stands as an emblem of loss, melancholy and resignation, as this status of renewal is merely temporary. Malleability is the prerogative of childish innocence, according to Pullman, and growing up – that is prioritizing experience over this innocence, from what the author says – is perceived as a second Fall from the Garden of Eden. These somber emotions are highly visible in the old sailor – a mirror of his literary creator? – of the novel and in Pullman himself, who carried on during his interview:

> Grown-ups don't have that. We've lost that. But on the other hand, we've gained something as well. We've gained a sort of subtle strength, a singleness of purpose which will carry us through to the destination which we're aiming for. I suppose you could say if children have innocence and

> then we lose that innocence, what we can hope to gain by living and suffering and working and loving and losing is wisdom. And the great difference is that innocence can't be wise, but wisdom can't be innocent.[107]

Pullman expressed here, like many authors of children's literature, this nostalgia for the potentiality associated with childhood, even if he accompanied it with a will to find something positive in every situation. Pantalaimon will end up finding his definitive form as a marten in the final book of the trilogy when Will, the teenager in love with Lyra, decides to caress her daemon, which is strictly established as a "great taboo" in the novel – touching the daemon of someone else being indeed perceived as the uttermost violation, as Lyra's capture by the "gobblers" illustrates perfectly:

> And suddenly all the strength went out of her.
>
> It was as if an alien hand had reached right inside where no hand had a right to be, and wrenched at something deep and precious.
>
> She felt faint, dizzy, sick, disgusted, limp with shock.
>
> One of the men was *holding* Pantalaimon. [...]
>
> She *felt* those hands. ... It wasn't *allowed*. ... Not *supposed* to touch. ... Wrong. ... (1: 241),

– and thus strongly emphasizes the idea of a budding sexuality:

[107] Scholastic Book Club. Interview with Philip Pullman. <http://clubs-kids.scholastic.co.uk/clubs_content/7922>. Web. And: Colbert, David. *The Magical Worlds of Philip Pullman: A Treasury of Fascinating Facts*. New York: Penguin, 2006. Print. 108-9

> A new mood had taken hold of [Will], and he felt resolute and peaceful. Knowing exactly what he was doing and exactly what it would mean, he moved his hand from Lyra's wrist and stroked the red-gold fur of her dæmon.
>
> Lyra gasped. But her surprised was mixed with a pleasure so like the joy that flooded through her when she had put the fruit to his lips that she couldn't protest, because she was breathless. With a racing heart she responded in the same way: she put her hand on the silky warmth of Will's dæmon, and as her fingers tightened in the fur, she knew that Will was feeling exactly as she was.
>
> And she knew, too, that neither dæmon would change now, having felt a lover's hands on them. These were their shapes for life: they would want no other. (3: 446-7)

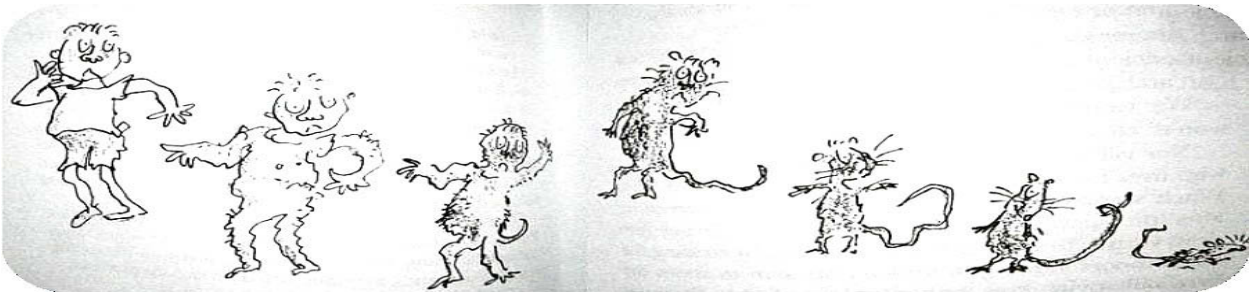
As with Lewis Carroll's Alice, Pullman's daemons simply stop morphing as soon as their sexuality becomes imminent. Their "settlement" represents the acceptance of their fate, becoming both something inevitable from which there is no point trying to run away and the beginning of a new life. Self-awareness thus would happen through a loss of possibilities and adulthood would tend to be perceived as a frozen, yet comfortable, condition.

Where Carroll did not wish to give an answer, and where Pullman seems torn between nostalgia and resignation, Dahl's *The Witches* sees the idea of alterity in relation to metamorphosis both as a source of entertainment for the character and his young

readers and as symbol of acceptance of oneself and others, through the changes life entails, and not as an unfortunate situation to which one must adjust anyway. The other, be it a child, an animal, or an animal-child, does not need to join the ranks of grown-up conformity in order to be accepted the way he/she is.

First, in Dahl's novel, metamorphosis – still a staging of the growing child – is depicted as an unbearable process. A body going through change is first physically painful. Readers might think of some inflamed joints, a chest that develops painfully, the traumatizing arrival of the menstrual cycle, etc. Changing, and by extension growing, is no picnic, and Dahl's young hero will not dispute it. In the novel, metamorphosis into an animal is treated as a symbolic death, followed by rebirth. If the plot will come to show the reader that the new life that follows the crisis of transformation is pleasant and allows the fulfillment of the deepest desires of the child, the journey to the animal kingdom is nevertheless described by the young protagonist as an atrocious experience:

> Oh, the pain and the fire! It felt as though a kettleful of boiling water had been poured into my mouth. My throat was going up in flames! Then very quickly the frightful burning searing scorching feeling started



> down into my chest and into my tummy and on and on into my arms and legs and all over my body!

> I screamed and screamed but once again the gloved hand was clasped over my lips. The next thing I felt was my skin beginning to tighten. How else can I describe it? It was quite literally a tightening and shrinking of the skin all over my body from the top of my head to the tips of my fingers to the ends of my toes! I felt as though I was a balloon and somebody was twisting the top of the balloon and twisting and twisting and the balloon was getting smaller and smaller and the skin was getting tighter and tighter and soon it was going to burst. (114-5)

The use of the first person singular in the description intensifies the impressions of limb quartering and suffocation that transpire through the reading. And it only seems to be getting worse: "Then the *squeezing* began. This time I was inside a suit of iron and somebody was turning a screw, and with each turn of the screw the iron suit became smaller and smaller so that I was squeezed like an orange into a pulpy mess with the juice running out of my sides." (115) This metaphor of fruit juice pressed inside of a pierced metal armor is a clear reference – though seriously toned-down – to the iron maiden, the medieval instrument of torture used to bleed to death the unlucky prisoners of its hard embrace. Ending with: "After that there came a fierce prickling sensation all over my skin (or what was left of my skin) as though tiny needles were forcing their way out through the surface of the skin from the inside, and this, I realise now, was the growing of the mouse-fur." (115) Here again, it is easy to bring together this appearance of new forms and body parts with the allegorical crossing of the body into adulthood. The author immerses his audience in the very heart of the crisis, or symbolic death, suffered by his protagonist – who emphasizes it by reflecting: "I remember thinking: I am not myself any

longer! I have gone clear out of my own skin! [...] I realised that I was not a little boy any longer. I was A MOUSE. ” (115-6) It is not a question of imagining a young boy inside the body of a mouse. The child is no longer, only the animal is left. In the way he tackles metamorphosis, Dahl clearly refuses to dissociate the body from the soul. In a way, he subtly tries to convey a message of acceptance towards change, no matter how painful, overwhelming or spectacular. The narrative insinuates that there is no point striving to be other than what we are.

Although the transformation process is arduous, the final result is perceived as being positive. It is logical that the crossing from one universe to another, especially if it is a source of profit, has to be strenuous. It is a passage, a type of initiation ordeal that will lead to a higher life stage. After that, the fusion to the natural, animal world happens immediately: “quite amazingly, the pain had all gone now. I was feeling quite remarkably well.” (117) The young boy, or rather the mouse pup, cannot help repeating over and over again how much easier everything seems, more instinctive, enjoyable and fun: “terrifically funny,” (119) “quite marvellous.” (190) Dahl aims – through metaphorical metamorphosis and the positive attitude of his young character – at teaching his audience that changing is a part of life, of its mishaps, disruptions and surprises, and that accepting its fluctuations while trying to turn them to their advantage will be a source of well-being. Everything has a downside one should be aware of, but it is just as important to acknowledge the bright side of all things: “I found myself thinking, *What’s so wonderful about being a little boy anyway? Why is it necessarily any better than being a mouse?* [...] *Yes*, I told myself, *I don’t think it is at all a bad thing to be a mouse.*” (119) Or: “I know what they’ve done, Grandmamma, and I know what I am, but the funny thing is

that I don't honestly feel especially bad about it. [...] In fact, I feel rather good. I know I'm not a boy any longer and I never will be again, but I'll be quite all right as long as there's always you to look after me." (126-7) Not only is the hero perfectly at ease in his new mouse body, but there is also a true sensory symbiosis. He is hardly ever surprised by the facility with which he has integrated his new condition: "I did it instinctively, without thinking." (125) Further down the text he is even described as using the new member his mouse body gives him access to, his tail, very naturally: "Suddenly there I was swinging to and fro upside down. It was terrific. I loved it." (163)

For Gilles Deleuze, the "devenir" (becoming) resides within change, that is: no longer taking the same decisions, feeling the same things or behaving the same way as before. The "devenir" is the way in which animal, human, mineral and vegetable unite to the point where they become indistinct and bring about a transformation that will affect its subject.[108] *The Witches'* young character is the perfect illustration of this idea. His ability to adjust, both physically and emotionally – accepting his new condition and actually deriving pleasure from it – makes him the incarnation of the "devenir," and not another expression of the largely fixed notion of growing-up that stemmed from the previous novels. The little boy's metamorphosis is not an end in itself, but the true beginning of a new life – as full of adventures: "It *is* rather grand, isn't it? [...] By golly, I thought, what marvellous things a mouse can do! And I'm only a beginner! [...] I thought to myself, *Oh boy, this is the life!*" (158/166/168-9) His morphed body gives him a feeling of freedom and joy accompanied by an increased power. Indeed, it is because of his new size and of the nimble moves of the mouse body that he can sneak in the kitchen

[108] For further reference, please watch: "A comme Animal." L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze. Writ. Claire Parnet and Gilles Deleuze. Dir. Pierre-André Boutang. Editions Montparnasse, 2004 (1988). DVD.

and spike the soup prepared for the witches; with the very same potion they had fed him earlier. In *Spinoza: philosophie pratique*, Deleuze talks about this joy of the affect that happens when an object is in agreement with one's nature, which then calls for an amplification of one's power of acting, and it is this very idea that Dahl's mouse-boy puts into practice with his triumph over the witches and the pleasure he extracts from it. The suffered metamorphosis, no matter how unintentional, is so in line with the character's nature that he even comes to correct his grandmother: "Not boy, [...] mouse." (154) The little hero turns his unexpected transformation into a genuine personal victory, not only finding the strength to accept his fate but also, and mostly, finding new opportunities and values within it: "I do believe that turning you into a mouse has doubled your brain power!" (155), his grandmother even tells him. Or even: "*Mice*, I felt pretty certain, *all like each other. People don't*." (119)

And interesting idea, especially when uttered by a child. Indeed, the readers will remember that, at the beginning of the novel, the protagonist was traumatized by his parents' death and was left to his grandmother's care, as she was his only next-of-kin. Naturally, metamorphosis serves as a subterfuge to the abandonment problem. Thanks to his newly acquired body, the child's deepest fears vanish. He no longer has to worry about surviving his grandmother, as was previously stated in this chapter: "we'll both die together." (196)

It is also a condition that places him in a state of complete and endless dependency from his grandmother. Though he is bound to age, he nevertheless will remain a mouse-child for the rest of his life. Through this ending *à la Peter Pan*, Dahl

addresses readers of all ages, confronting them with their fear of being left alone for the youngsters and with the nostalgia of what was lost for the more mature audience.

Nevertheless, the author does not stop at this frozen in time aspect, but also tackles the fear of change inherent to both the child and the teenager. As Maria Lassén-Seger writes in *Adventures Into Otherness*, metamorphosis in *The Witches* is also a "*test* of parental affection." (221) Truly, by way of mimesis, it is a question of reassuring young readers of the unconditional love of their entourage, in spite of any changes occasioned by growth. The narrator actually gives his audience this comforting thought from the very first pages of the novel: "The fact that I am still here and able to speak to you (however peculiar I may look) is due entirely to my wonderful grandmother." (12) A grandmother who will even go as far as expressing her pleasure at the transformation endured by the child: "Thank heavens you are a mouse." (202-3)

This behavior of complete adoption of the character no matter what he looks like externally is displayed in contrast with the reaction of Bruno Jenkins's parents – the second child to have been a victim of the witches' Formula 86 Delayed Action Mouse-Maker. The other boy is described as a spoiled, cowardly, selfish and lazy child; basically as different from the qualities the unnamed hero is vested with as possible. It is therefore somewhat logical that, if the main character is given unconditional love, Bruno, as for his poor unworthy self, happens to be the progeny of a woman who has a mice phobia, living in a house where the pet cat is completely revered. Therefore, by the end of the story, when the hero thinks about his comrade in fortune, he expresses worries regarding the fate that probably has befallen him: "I wouldn't be surprised if his father gave him to the hall-porter to drown in the fire-bucket." A doubt that his grandmother willingly

corroborates: “I’m afraid you may be right [...] The poor little thing.” (194) By comparison, when they return from England, the grandmother, the narrator explains, builds her grandchild a panoply of things (toothbrush, bathtub, bed, etc.) for his size and shows creativity and ingenuity so that he may live a life of comfort while enjoying as much freedom of action as possible: “After a few days, my grandmother began to invent gadgets for me in order to make life a bit easier.” (191)

This is a far cry from the acceptance through mimicry that was evoked in Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*. Roald Dahl’s message to his readers is that true love, be it parental or not, survives the changes of the growing body, puberty’s emotional torments, as well as any other occurrence that might happen. As his young hero declares: “It doesn’t matter who you are or what you look like so long as somebody loves you.” (197) Dahl stages in his novel the child as he/she is in real life, that is to say a being that grows, changes and evolves constantly. These variations might be scary, even sometimes painful, but they are necessary, and are not an end. In a similar fashion to Lewis Carroll and his Alice – “Who in the world am I?” (15), – Dahl and his protagonist ponder over the human being in transformation: “Now that I was so small, everything looked different.” (191) As we grow and change, so do our perceptions of ourselves and of the people and things that surround us. Yet, it is not something to worry about. As it is the case with Dahl’s character, there are always new ways to adjust and appreciate differences; even to laugh at them: “It’s funny [...] but ever since I became a mouse I’ve hated the taste of sweets and chocolate.” (193) And if affixing an exact definition to what we are – or to what we are in the process of becoming – can reveal a delicate endeavor, is it truly absolutely necessary? The “I’m a sort of mouse-person” (132) of Dahl’s character

is more than enough to convey the author's lesson. Roald Dahl thus advanced the trope of metamorphosis within children's literature beyond the simple perceptions and interrogations of grown-ups, in order to try and help the young readers to navigate the tumults that await them as they grow.

Emblems of a threshold between two worlds, consequences of danger, but also a symbol of escape and liberation, the avatars of animality occupy a crucial space in children's literature. Overall, metamorphosis in literature for the young is used as a metaphor for the physical and sexual changes undergone by the growing child. Nonetheless, it also aims at being a synonym of escaping the helpless and weak condition of the child as well as the boredom and responsibilities of adult life. It also questions what makes human beings and their "devenir." Literary metamorphosis blurs the frontiers and allows a less clear distinction between childhood and adulthood, between self and the world, between human, animal and vegetable – all seem connected; – while still affixing new demarcations to it since, through metamorphosis, the adult makes the child into an "other" who could not be more extreme. Literary metamorphosis is indeed an open threshold towards alterity. It is a metaphysical lesson, exposing the young readers to human indecision and world mobility, as well as allowing them to either adjust to or free themselves from it, or sometimes both.

According to Canadian scholar of children's fiction, Sue Easun, metamorphosis in literature tries to be a symbol of life, as all beings possess within them the "power to metamorphose [themselves], to be reincarnated in variable, multiple and successive forms and in so doing defy annihilation." (41) Via fictional metamorphosis, a new perspective

on life is presented to the child. Thus, as writes Canadian professor Roderick McGillis, in his article "Self, Other and Other Self: Recognizing the Other in Children's Literature," "each attempt at story is an attempt to understand what it is like to be an 'Other'." (220) This is precisely what the world of fiction makes possible by advocating the power of the imaginary while, at the same time, acting as a safeguard, giving readers the opportunity to experience new sensations vicariously and to open themselves to new outlooks, without taking any real risk. Maria Lassén-Seger's article in *Children's Literature as Communication* supports the importance of the feeling awakened by literary metamorphosis, as she explains that it "allows both author and readers to indulge in titillating fantasies of how it feels to fly as a bird, or to explore the depths of the ocean as a giant whale. Such thrills are especially emphasized, precisely because they are conveyed as first-person narrations by the protagonists themselves, for the benefit of an implied child reader who will find them no less fascinating." (Sell, 166) This window on the "Other" is also designed to give the audience a heightened conscience of themselves and of the idea that they have of their power of acting. In the end, it is more an issue of raising crucial questions on human beings – what it is made of, what completes it or opposes it – than of truly answering them, which explains the ambiguity of some of the conclusions offered by the works analyzed in this chapter.

It is in these questions that we can find the idea of affect again, as metamorphosis represents all possibles by making the horizons of our awareness of the world and of ourselves undulate. In order to better illustrate the repercussions, or ripple effect, of such blurring of demarcations, what could be more representative than the staging of children protagonists? Indeed, in literature as much as in popular beliefs and primary theories on

the child, the latter is seen as a being who occupies a liminal position between nature and culture, human and animal, childhood and adulthood, weakness and power, real and imaginary. Children, through literary metamorphosis, offer an understanding of the civilization/savage world relation and invite readers to grow in wisdom. What children's literature tells the readers is that the dividing lines between the animal kingdom and the human world are nothing but fictitious figurations. Within the high malleability that reigns upon literature for the young, they are in truth two entities of one and the same reality. Metamorphosis, though an exercise in or of difference, nonetheless represents the unity of the universe and the interdependence of the beings that populate it. The image of the animal in children's literature strives at being an emblem, via narratives of anthropomorphism and metamorphosis, of a new outlook on all worlds. It also allows the confrontation of children to ideas of crossings and coming together – rather than to exiguous categorizations, – as well as to their own multiplicity. "I" is plural, and the child, sometimes a prisoner of this liminal position attributed to him/her, is the ultimate example of it, which led many a writer for children to also turn to narratives of hybridity.

Chapter 6:

"I am two,"[109] or the power of the hybrid

In the universe of children's literature, all existing creatures seem gifted with speech. The reader cannot help but notice the vast presence of the animal world in fiction for the young. Animals seem closer to the natural world and, by extension, its inhabitants. No one, be it a child or adult reader, is particularly shocked by the abundance of talking animals in books since they think, live and feel the same way humans do. It is fairly easy to recognize the features or moods of one's entourage in the accentuated personalities of the animals of children's literature. Through analogies drawn with reality, the animals represent the familiar and help children develop an awareness of the protagonists, behaviors and narratives of life. There is, in children's books, a veritable openness between animal and child.

Anthropomorphism and metamorphosis – usually in stories aimed at children readers aged up to 5 or 6 and from 7 to about 11, respectively – represent the crossing from one world to another. However, there are, in fiction for the young, characters that belong to neither the animal world nor that of the human, and which are, consequently, rather difficult to classify. British scholar Tess Cosslett, in a critical study on talking animals, claims that children "hold subject positions between opposed categories such as animal and human, childhood and adulthood, nature and culture, white and dark." (139) Walter Benjamin explained this absence of clear delimitations by the ability of "creative distortion" that the childish perception allows. For Benjamin, the child's way of thinking knows no censorship and can thus function as a type of spiritual resistance able to create

[109] Kipling, Rudyard. *The Jungle Books*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004 (1894). Print.78

radically new mental patterns that adults have either forgotten or suppressed. (1996 3: 391) This ocean of possibilities that the child represents in the imagination of adults gives birth to hybrid figures – neither entirely human nor exactly animal – in both literature and historical texts. Childhood is constructed as a transitory space, an in-between that seems to echo, in the literature that targets it, interrogations on the human condition. The idea of the child as a hybrid is very much rooted in the philosophical questions that have animated men through history, which is why, in this chapter, the historical case of a so-called hybrid will be studied first, to understand how the trend came to be and what it entailed in terms of issues, as well as to see how facts and fiction often become so entwined when it comes to children and their fictional counterparts that interpreting what the child is gets even more arduous. The end of the chapter will analyze how the trend evolved in modern children's literature, if it survived.

The hybrid is a character that fascinates and displays multiple facets. It targets children readers of all ages simultaneously, although there seems to be more hybrid figures in narratives aimed at older, more experienced readers (on the verge of adolescence, notably). Figure of desire as much as abjection, of human weakness and of a power that almost falls under the divine, the hybrid has, throughout history, made itself present both in the reports on captures of savage children and in novels for children. The 19th century even saw flourish multiple fictions where young boys bred by animals would later elevate themselves to the status of civilized men. The now canonic names of Tarzan and Mowgli are two of the most striking examples of the literary unfurling of the "natural" *bildungsroman* that followed the discovery of many wild children in 18th and 19th centuries Europe. Some of the historical narrations written about said savage children

were incidentally nothing more than mere fiction themselves, and establishing truth from the fictitious is, today still, an ongoing task.

Salvage children and, more generally, the idea of the hybridity of childhood, have not ceased to fascinate and reflect a desire to cross the realms human/animal – and to dominate both – that actually seems very adult. They appear to echo a longing from adult observers and writers towards the freedom that a primitive state might provide. Childhood would appear to be an ideal stage to this question of hybridity because it represents a blurring of demarcations. The child also tends to be seen as an 'other' to the adult – as much as the animal is – and the innocence that is openly attributed to childhood seems closer to the state of the "natural" than is, in theory, the adult, which helped maintain the quasi obsessive rapprochements made between children and animals, both throughout history and the existence of a literature for the young.

Sociologist and children's literature scholar, Thomas van der Walt, declares that:

> the myth of the animal-child is still comfortably lodged within Western thinking today. However, associating the child uncritically with animals and nature is not unproblematic. This point of view reflects the sentimental Romantic notion of an innocently natural child uncorrupted by adulthood, as well as the stereotypical image of the child as an uncivilized savage. (36)

These images of the natural yet uncivilized child can also be found in the reports on Victor, the savage of Aveyron, whose capture and story of education process ignited 19th century France. His discovery gave birth to many fictions on the relation child/animal as well as to a profound reflection on the human condition, from a spiritual

point of view as well as a physical one. With him, the questions of the possibility to renegotiate the lines of self and others, which would later inflame children's literature, were born.

Thirty years after the first publication of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile, ou de l'éducation* (*Emile or, On Education*), doctors busied themselves with observing and educating Victor, in the style of his literary counterpart. Looking for proofs on the origins of man and the theory of the missing link, what did they really discover about this entanglement between the child and the animal that authors of fiction for the young commonly ascribe to their characters? Looking closely at the reports on Victor and the literary examples of Emile and Mowgli, this chapter will aim at comparing figures of the hybrid and the extension of the powers that are allocated to them. It will also contemplate the evolution, in children's literature, of the concept of the hybrid in the 20th and 21st centuries, and its transformation, no longer into a superior being – especially physically – but into an instrument of spiritual connection with the natural world. Daniel Pennac's *L'Œil du loup* (*The Eye of the Wolf*) will be used to that purpose and to question the validity of this continuous rapprochement between the child and the animal.

Stories of young children, who, unfortunately, are left into the wild, deprived of parents and isolated from human society, appear in many cultures. In such circumstances animals will often play a nutritive role, providing the milk necessary to early childhood and training young boys and girls in the ways of nature. If different animals pose as adoptive parents in narratives of wild children, wolves are probably the most recurrent, maybe because of their pack instincts. In Western culture, the latter occupy a special place as feeders, mostly because of the legendary twins Remus and Romulus. "The she-

wolf is the savage mammal that presents the highest frequency of manifestations of pseudo-gestation, an affliction that may inspire an irrational maternal love, even towards inanimate objects," explains French surgeon and author Serge Aroles in *L'Enigme des Enfants-Loups : Une certitude biologique mais un déni des archives, 1304-1954*, a study on the reported cases of wild children. (27-8) Yet, he also writes that only in extremely rare occasions would the infant nursed by a she-wolf survive at the end of this period of pseudo-gestation. It would then be more than likely that the she-wolf would devour the child, if another member of the pack had not already done so. If fiction often prevails on scientific realities, the idea of the savage child nonetheless fascinates, and has done so since the Middle Ages. This bewitchment that the wild child creates gives body to a very strong desire to overcome the chasm that separates the animal world and that of the human.

In the 18th century, Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, Bernard Connor and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as philosophers, historians, or naturalists, started to talk about these children deprived of education and of any human example to follow. They were the very first to broach the subject seriously, in opposition to the mind wanderings that narratives of salvage children naturally engendered. When, in 1799, a ten-year-old child who grew up far from men and their civilization is captured, it is rather likely that France had in mind Rousseau's "Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes" ("Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men") and *Emile, ou de l'éducation*, published in 1755 and 1762, respectively. It is therefore not surprising that "his person was deemed of major importance to the knowledge of the "moral" man," and that he was the very first wild

child to become the object of a thorough study. (Aroles 212) His life fascinates, even today. It took until 1964 for all of Jean Itard's (the physician who took it upon himself to educate the boy) reports to be gathered and published by French sociologist Lucien Malson. Even more recently, the savage child found himself in the spotlight again when French psychiatrist Thierry Gineste found and published in 2004 the details of the capture of the young boy in *Victor de l'Aveyron : dernier enfant sauvage, premier enfant fou* (*Victor of Aveyron: last savage child, first insane child)*, and when, in 2007, Serge Aroles published a study on all known cases of savage children, to whom the boy belonged and where the author tries to distinguish facts from fiction.

When he is discovered in the Aveyron department in 1799, the "wild" child is completely naked. He only eats acorns and roots and is described as being mistrustful and agile. Villagers occasionally caught glimpses of him yet he escaped all attempts of capture until was located the "sort of hut he had built with branches and leaves" where he used to spend the night and that was surrounded by a "huge amount of excrement" – which they took as a sure sign of habitation. (Gineste 23) He is sent to Paris in August 1800 and is entrusted to the care of Dr. Jean Itard, chief of the Institution Impériale des Sourds-Muets (Imperial Institute for the Deaf and Mute), who will be in charge of his reeducation. Confronted to a child who lived entirely isolated from human society, Itard proposes to "déterminer quel serait le degré d'intelligence et la nature des idées d'un adolescent qui, privé dès son enfance de toute éducation, aurait vécu entièrement séparé des individus de son espèce."[110] Itard's goal here resonates with one of the most

[110] "Les progrès d'un jeune sauvage," Jean Itard's first report, 1801, in: Itard, Jean et Lucien Malson. *Les Enfants sauvages : Mythe et réalité suivi de Mémoire et rapport sur Victor de l'Aveyron,* Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1999 (1964). Print. 134
English translation by John Jones: "to determinate what would be the degree of understanding, and the

important interrogations of the time, which is: what makes a man, of nature or culture? Upon his arrival at the Institute, the boy does not talk, shows reluctance to wearing clothes, chews with his incisor teeth and only eats raw things, refuses to sleep in a bed, bites anyone who bothers him, walks with his hands on the ground when he is tired and satisfies his natural urges anywhere. He is the emblem of a "purely animal life," (Itard 1801; Malson 135), or so declares Pinel, a French citizen, after having paid him a visit. Itard names the boy Victor for two reasons: the "o" being the first syllable the boy manages to utter, the doctor found natural to give him a name that contained this sound and, as for the second and most interesting reason, due to the fact that, at the same time, a play entitled "Victor, ou l'enfant de la forêt" ("Victor, or the Child of the Forest") was playing in the theater. One can notice here that even in the case of a medical and scientific initiative, fiction rarely strayed very far.

Itard establishes that Victor must have been abandoned around the age of four or five, which means that he must now be facing seven years of complete isolation, reducing to nothing the few fragments of education he might have received in early infancy. The doctor then decides to start over Victor's education from the start and to teach him, sense after sense, how to awaken to society. Reading Itard's decision process on the course to follow with Victor, it seems quite obvious that the doctor had read Rousseau's *Emile*. Indeed the educational methods used by Itard are similar to those praised by the narrator of *Emile*: starting from nature and following the young man all the way to his integration and installation within human society. There is, here again, a very ambiguous relation

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nature of the ideas of a youth, who, deprived, from his infancy, of all education, should have lived entirely separated from individuals of his species." Itard, Jean, and John Jones. A*n Historical Account of the Discovery and Education of a Savage Man*. London: Wilson & Co, 1802. Print. 24-5

between fiction and reality, between the child that is and the one that adults create in their writings. In order facilitate Victor's journey towards civilization, Itard decides to:

> rédui[re] à cinq vues principales le traitement moral ou l'éducation du *Sauvage de l'Aveyron*. Première vue : l'attacher à la vie sociale, en la lui rendant plus douce que celle qu'il menait alors, et surtout plus analogue à la vie qu'il venait de quitter. Deuxième vue : réveiller la sensibilité nerveuse par les stimulants les plus énergiques et quelquefois par les vives affections de l'âme. Troisième vue : étendre la sphère de ses idées en lui donnant des besoins nouveaux, et en multipliant ses rapports avec les êtres environnants. Quatrième vue : le conduire à l'usage de la parole en déterminant l'exercice de l'imitation par la loi impérieuse de la nécessité. Cinquième vue : exercer pendant quelque temps sur les objets de ses besoins physiques les plus simples opérations de l'esprit en déterminant ensuite l'application sur des objets d'instruction. (Itard 1801; Malson 139-40)[111]

Itard agrees here with Rousseau's idea that the engine of learning is desire, present interest, and that it is from need that men develop their relation to things, structure their environments and construct a vision of the world. "The position of the stars, the distance

[111] "redu[ce] to five principal heads the moral treatment or education of the *Savage of Aveyron*. My object were, / 1st. To attach him to social life, by rendering it more pleasant to him than that which he was then leading, and above all, more analogous to the mode of existence that he was about to quit. / 2d. To awaken the nervous sensibility by the most energetic stimulants, and sometimes by lively affections of the mind. / 3d. To extend the sphere of his ideas, by giving him new wants, and by increasing the number of his relations to the objects surrounding him. / 4th. To lead him to the use of speech by subjecting him to the necessity of imitation. / 5th. To exercise frequently the most simple operations of the mind upon the objects of his physical wants; and, at length, by inducing the application of them to objects of instruction." (Jones's translation 32-4)

from sight, the relative weight, the decoding of signs, etc. are integrated as and when the need comes," adds Yves Vargas in his *Introduction à l'Emile de Rousseau*. (13)

In fiction as well as in historical accounts, it is actually interesting to notice that each sense is taught by itself, separately from all others. And in both accounts, the predominant sense is that of taste, which is also one of the most primitives – hunger simply calling for reactive action. Like Emile, Victor is mostly interested in food rewards. If his preceptor manages to make Emile run with the promise of getting cake: "la gourmandise est la passion de l'enfance. [...] Dans l'enfance on ne songe qu'à ce qu'on mange. [...] Emile ne regarde point le gâteau que j'ai mis sur la pierre comme le prix d'avoir bien couru ; il sait seulement que le seul moyen d'avoir ce gâteau est d'y arriver plus tôt qu'un autre," (Rousseau 167-8)[112] Itard succeeds in getting Victor to place the letters of the word "lait" (milk) in the right order with the promise of pouring him a glass of it afterwards. Although Itard did succeed here in establishing a link between the need and the object, a similar thing to what was said of Emile can be said of Victor: he does not see the glass of milk as reward but simply gives in to the exercise in order to obtain what he desires, which is perceived as rather primal. It is a relation of signs-force-desire, as Vargas calls it, that Rousseau stages when Emile learns how to read by himself, from necessity, as he wishes to understand the little invitation notes to after-school parties that he had received. Itard tries to awaken the same desire in Victor and presents him with boards showing words that he must place next to the objects he likes, in order to make the meaning correspond. When Victor succeeds, Itard gives him chestnuts, which

[112] "The best way to lead children is by the mouth. [...] The child thinks of nothing but his food. [...] Emile does not consider the cake I put on the stone as a reward for good running; he knows the only way to get the cake is to get there first." Translated by Barbara Foxley in: Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Emile*. Salt Lake City: Project Gutenberg, 2011. Ebook.

he adores. Yet it seems clear that Victor memorizes the positions of the signs after a few attempts but does not understand what they mean. To him, they are empty and do not correspond to any experience. Itard will even end up admitting, in his second report in 1806: "Au bout de quelques mois, mon élève savait lire et écrire passablement une série de mots. [...] Mais cette lecture était toute intuitive ; Victor lisait les mots sans les prononcer, sans en connaître la signification." (Malson 201)[113]

In spite of the progress made, it is interesting to notice that Victor will never stop being compared to an animal. When he recognizes out of habit the signs indicating a stroll to come, Itard writes:

> Je ne donne point ce fait comme preuve d'une intelligence supérieure ; et il n'est personne qui ne m'objecte que le chien le plus ordinaire en fait au moins autant. Mais en admettant cette égalité morale, on est obligé d'avouer un grand changement ; et ceux qui ont vu le *Sauvage de l'Aveyron* lors de son arrivée à Paris, savent qu'il était fort inférieur, sous le rapport du discernement, au plus intelligent de nos animaux domestiques. (Itard 1801; Malson 156)[114]

He is compared to a dog, a pet of low intelligence that only answers to habit or need, although it is here somewhat intended as a compliment on the doctor's part, in the light of the progress the boy has made since his arrival. Several months after his capture,

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[113] "After a few months, my pupil could read and write a series of words quite well. [...] But this reading conveyed no meaning to him. Victor read the words without pronouncing them and without understanding their significance." Translated by George and Muriel Humphrey, in: Itard, Jean. *The Wild Boy of the Aveyron*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962. Print. 61

[114] "I do not give this fact as a proof of a superior intelligence, since there is nobody that might object that the most common dog is capable of doing as much. But even admitting this mental equality *between the boy and the brute* [the part in italics is a liberty that the translator took, and is not present in the original French document], we must at least allow that an important change had taken place; and those who had seen the *Savage of Aveyron*, immediately after his arrival at Paris, know that he was vastly inferior, with regard to discernment, to the more intelligent of our domestic animals." (Jones's translation 69)

Victor is also able to recognize some demands. If Itard shows him his disheveled hair, Victor brings him a comb, and if his governess shows him the empty water carafe, Victor goes outside to fill it. In this highly mechanical functioning, it is impossible not to be reminisced of a dog to which one sends a ball or a stick, with the hope it might run and bring it back. Such details, though diminishing in their phrasing, nevertheless display a comprehension of simple signs, which Rousseau call "vertus de singe" (virtues of a monkey; 98) in *Emile*, while also declaring them as being necessary habits to develop until the child is able to discern things by himself. It is a condescending positivism that is also found in Itard when he comments on Victor's actions:

> Beaucoup de personnes ne voient dans tous ces procédés que la façon de faire d'un animal ; pour moi, je l'avouerai, je crois y reconnaître dans toute sa simplicité le langage d'action, ce langage primitif de l'espèce humaine, originellement employé dans l'enfance des premières sociétés, avant que le travail de plusieurs siècles eût coordonné le système de la parole et fourni à l'homme civilisé un fécond et sublime moyen de perfectionnement, qui fait éclore sa pensée même dans son berceau, et dont il se sert toute la vie sans apprécier ce qu'il est par lui, et ce qu'il serait sans lui s'il s'en trouvait accidentellement privé, comme dans le cas qui nous occupe. (Itard 1801; Malson 172)[115]

[115] "Many persons see, in all these proceedings, only the common instinctive actions of an animal; as for myself, I confess, that I recognize in them the *language of action*, in all its simplicity; that primitive language of the human species, originally employed in the infancy of society, before the labour of many ages had arranged and established the system of speech, and furnished to civilized man a fertile and sublime means of indefinite improvement, which calls forth his understanding even in his cradle, and of which he makes use all his life without appreciating what he is by means of it, and what he would be without its assistance if here were accidentally deprived of it, as in the case which at present occupies our attention." (Jones's translation 106-7)

The lexicon of simplicity, primitiveness, childishness of first societies, and even the word "berceau" (crib), affixed to the multiple references to animals, all seem to hint at a closeness between childhood and animality – both being interpreted as inferior to the civilized adult man. Whether it is to bring him closer to or distinguish him from it, one cannot help but notice that the word "animal" appears in every single of Itard's comments about Victor. The sense that the latter will end up developing the most is, incidentally, that of smell and he is described on several occasions as scenting his food before taking it to his mouth, a habit that is reminiscent of animals and that Victor will retain to his death. These are the type of descriptions that drove many of his visitors to call him "être phénoméneux" (phenomenous being) and "bestial" (beastly), "objet de science" (object of science), "curiosité publique" (public curiosity), "hybride" (hybrid) and "abominable excentricité" (revolting eccentricity). (Gineste 25/28/37)

This in-between that Victor represents – and that repulsed many of his spectators – inevitably reminds the modern reader of Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject. Indeed, if the figure of the wild child fascinates, it nevertheless remains worrisome and foul in the eyes of many. Victor and savage children in general disturb the established notions of identity, system and order, and yet arouse a desire of freedom and a somewhat voyeuristic pleasure in the spectators. The hybridity of the wild child is characterized by ambiguity and ambivalence. Said child, like Victor, does not fit into either the animal kingdom or human society. "Celui par qui l'abject existe, » writes Kristeva, « est donc un *jeté* qui (se) place, (se) *sépare*, (se) situe et donc *erre*, au lieu de se reconnaître, de désirer, d'appartenir ou de refuser." (15)[116] Victor stood on the edge of two possibilities

[116] "The one by whom the abject exists is thus a deject who places (himself), separates (himself), situates (himself), and therefore strays instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing." Translated

and occupied a liminal space without actually belonging to either of the two universes to which he was associated. Itard even confessed to regretting and cursing the day he was captured: “Oh ! Combien [...] ai-je regretté d’avoir connu cet enfant, et condamné hautement la stérile et inhumaine curiosité des hommes qui, les premiers, l’arrachèrent à une vie innocente et heureuse !” (Itard 1806; Malson 199)[117] Victor never lost the habits of looking longingly through the window, rejoicing in seeing the moonlight or running through the fields any time he was allowed to. Itard related in 1806 that Victor's last attempt to run away was met with failure and a spontaneous return, “chassé sans doute par la faim et l’impossibilité de pouvoir désormais se suffire à lui-même.” (Itard 1806; Malson 234)[118]

Instead of educating Victor towards the status of civilized man integrated into society, Itard's attempts, contrary to that of Rousseau on the fictional Emile, only managed to reinforce his hybrid status: unable to enjoy the independence and resources of animals but also ignorant of human society and unfit to find his place within it. Itard concluded that man, without civilization, is even less than an animal and is deep down nothing but a mere eventuality. Victor died in 1828, in a house in Paris, near the Institute directed by Itard, where his governess was still taking care of him, entirely forgotten, just like the character of an outdated novel, and never having learned how to talk.

If Victor digressed here from Rousseau's theory that recommended a natural education, sheltered from human society, to produce superior beings, Rudyard Kipling's

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by Leon S. Roudiez. Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1982 (1980). Print. 8

[117] “Oh! How [...] I have regretted knowing this child, and highly condemned the sterile and inhuman curiosity of the men who first took him away from a happy and innocent life!” (Humphrey's translation 59)

[118] “doubtless driven by hunger and the impossibility of providing for himself any longer.” (Humphrey's translation 89)

Mowgli, as for him, is the perfect incarnation of it. Victor's case, which engendered a genuine reflection on the human condition and its limits, is at the root of many literary narratives using the idea of a child torn between man and animal. Where reality is met with resistance, as Itard observed with Victor, fiction gives a permeability of the two universes. The contrast of the nostalgic reverie and learning blocks experienced by Victor with Mowgli's nearly superhuman faculties is accentuated in favor of these variability and power that children's literature allows. Fiction might just succeed where history failed, in allowing the lines of otherness to be renegotiated.

Mowgli, like Emile, learns from nature and not from men, until reaching his maturity. This goes even further in Mowgli's case since, not only is he raised apart from men, but it is actually the animals of the jungle that attend to his education. Mowgli is the embodiment of the "natural savage:" vigorous, impulsive, primitive and, most importantly, unstained by human vices. Kipling wrote his novel in 1894, at a time when narratives of wild children where all the rage in Europe as well as in India. Hundreds of cases were reported throughout the world in the 19th century, tightly blending fiction and reality. With the writing of *The Jungle Books*, it would seem that Kipling wanted to ground a philosophy of human nature, a theory of education and a distinct notion of the ambiguous relationship that exists between humans and the natural world. To do so, he created Mowgli, a hybrid character, taken in by wolves as an infant, and educated at the school of Baloo the bear and Bagheera the panther, who teach him the laws of the jungle.

> [Mowgli] grew up with the cubs, [...] and Father Wolf taught him his business, and the meaning of things in the Jungle, till every rustle in the grass, every breath of the warm night air, every note of the owls above

> his head, every scratch of a bat's claws as it roosted for a while in a tree, and every splash of every little fish jumping in a pool, meant just as much to him as the work of his office means to a businessman. (16)

If Victor of Aveyron was constantly compared to animals, it is interesting to notice that the opposite phenomenon is presented to the readers in Mowgli's case. The latter is, from the very beginning of the novel, associated with, and often even assimilated to, the men from whom he came despite acting closer to the way the animals around him act than he ever did when it comes to men. Indeed, Mowgli hunts and eats raw meat, just like his wolf mentors. Around ten years old, he is described as a blooming, loyal and happy man-cub, an association of words that already marks his status as a hybrid. However, if the narrator willingly compares him to the men, he is not the only one to do so, as the animals that surround Mowgli, his "brothers" included, continually remind him of his hybrid condition, actually accusing him of it often. Which leads the main character to ponder internally on his condition as a man and what defines it: "And what is a man that he should not run with his brothers? […] I was born in the Jungle; I have obeyed the Law of the Jungle; and there is no wolf of ours from whose paws I have not pulled a thorn. Surely they are my brothers!" (18)

What, then, is Mowgli? Is he boy or cub? And, most importantly, what does *he* think he is? The reader is just as confused as Mowgli is when it comes to his condition. If he is willing to admit that there was a "before" his being a wolf – "Why should I fear? I remember now – if it is not a dream – how, before I was a wolf, I lay beside the Red Flower, and it was warm and pleasant" (21) – he vehemently denies the idea of now

being anything other than the canidae: ""Nay, nay, I am a wolf. I am of one skin with the Free People," Mowgli cried. "It is of no will of mine that I am a man."" (347)

Notwithstanding the fact that Mowgli may well try to convince himself that he is one with the wolves, it will never be the case. The idea of "will" is interesting though, and hints at branched questions: do will and desires play any part in the man being a man? And if so, can one wish to be other? Or is it precisely the ability to will or wish, when animals work mostly on instincts, that confines men to their condition? But Mowgli is never to be a true wolf and Bagheera even reminds him that the insouciance that characterizes him is nothing but the manifest sign of his condition as a man. Mowgli eventually comes to admit his liminal position and the duality of his soul as he sings, after having killed Shere Khan, the tiger: "These two things [i.e. belonging to both the village and the jungle] fight together in me as the snakes fight in the spring. The water comes out of my eyes; yet I laugh while it falls. Why? / I am two Mowglis. […] / *Ahae*! My heart is heavy with the things that I do not understand." (78) It is as if the protagonist was hanging, torn between the village and jungle, and between the wolf and the man he both is. He has a double identity and, while he is a part of both places and both definitions, can neither choose nor belong wholly. Mowgli's hybridity is experienced as a plague that divides him: "the Man Pack have cast me out. I did them no harm, but they were afraid of me. Why? / Wolf Pack, ye have cast me out too. The Jungle is shut to me and the village gates are shut. Why? / As Mang flies between the beasts and the birds so fly I between the village and the jungle. Why?" (78) Mowgli is split and, as such, is condemned to exile. He is rejected on all sides as a being both too powerful and

threatening, a monstrous figure of hybridity, to the point where even he does not really know who he actually is.

Left at the mercy of wild beasts by his parents, so that they could flee and save their own lives, then banished from the jungle by his pack, and hunted down by stone-throwing villagers, Mowgli perfectly epitomizes Kristeva's notion of the abject. Indeed, she writes in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (*Powers of Horror*) that "toute littérature est probablement une version de cette apocalypse qui [lui] paraît s'enraciner, quelles qu'en soient les conditions socio-historiques, dans la frontière fragile ("borderline") où les identités (sujet/objet, etc.) ne sont pas ou ne sont qu'à peine – doubles, floues, hétérogènes, animales, métamorphosées, altérées, abjectes." (245)[119] Naturally, if Mowgli does repulse animals and men alike, he still remains just as engrossing to them – and the readers. Indeed, though the young man belongs to neither the village nor the jungle, he can nevertheless go from one to the other without experiencing the slightest difficulty. It is undeniable that his condition as a hybrid divides him but it also grants him immense power.

First of all, even as an infant in the grip of true carnivores, Mowgli is not afraid, neither of the wolves nor of the other inhabitants of the jungle. He seems to have naturally found his place. When Father Wolf comes close to him, on a dark night, the baby looks at him and simply starts to laugh. So the wolf gets a hold of him and brings him to his companion:

[119] "all literature is probably a version of the apocalypse that seems to me rooted, no matter what its socio-historical conditions might be, on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so—double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject." (Roudiez's translation 207)

> "How little! How naked and – how bold!" said Mother Wolf, softly. The baby was pushing his way between the cubs to get close to the warm hide. "Ahai! He is taking his meal with the others. And so this is a man's cub. Now, was there ever a wolf that could boast of a man's cub among her children?"
>
> "I have heard now and again of such a thing, but never in our pack or in my time," said Father Wolf. "He is altogether without hair, and I could kill him with a touch of my foot. But see, he looks up and is not afraid." (10-1)

Mowgli does not know fear and continues, in his childhood, to adjust very well to his new environment.

One of Mowgli's most important attributes is indeed his adaptability, which becomes the principal source of the power he develops in the narrative. He can go from the jungle to the village and back; he speaks fluently all the languages of all the animals and learns that of the men with an enviable ease. He is the only one to possess the ability to communicate with these two worlds. He can also climb, swim, hunt and run better than any living thing, says the narrator. In addition to this, he is the only one able to remove thorns from his "brothers'" paws and unconsciously has the instinct to dominate. The hybrid, because he is different and unique, navigating both worlds with ease, is the key to solving problems in the story – and answering authors' and readers' questions on the human condition, – which unfortunately for him does not equal acceptance from his peers. But, to get back to the – certainly "unnatural" – power bestowed on the hybrid that

Mowgli is, upon arrival among the wolves, Mother Wolf had incidentally already predicted that he would be the only one able to free the jungle from Shere Khan:

> He came naked, by night, alone and very hungry; yet he was not afraid! Look, he has pushed one of my babes to one side already. And that lame butcher would have killed him, and would have run off to the Waingunga while the villagers here hunted through all our lairs in revenge! Keep him? Assuredly I will keep him. Lie still, little frog. O thou Mowgli, – for Mowgli, the Frog, I will call thee, – the time will come when thou wilt hunt Shere Khan as he has hunted thee! (12)

A prophecy that will actually be fulfilled several years later. Mowgli also notices as a very young child that he can naturally exercise a great power of persuasion or dissuasion on the animals of the jungle: "He took his place at the Council Rock, too, when the Pack met, and there he discovered that if he stared hard at any wolf, the wolf would be forced to drop his eyes, and so he used to stare for fun." (16)

If Mowgli's hybrid status makes an outcast out of him – being, in the end, rejected from both worlds, – it also allows him to raise himself to the rank of demigod. Indeed, only he can experience both animal life and human life, but he is also the only one to have some sort of ascendency on both, and to be able to follow his own rules. To him, beasts and men are equal and nothing but masks that he can borrow and wear unlimitedly, which might explain the rather peculiar way he has of describing his own evolution: ""Mowgli the Frog have I been," said he to himself; "Mowgli the Wolf have I said that I am. Now Mowgli the Ape must I be before I am Mowgli the Buck. At the end I shall be Mowgli the Man." (338) Here the choice of verbs is very interesting, from "have

been" and "am" to "must be," "am" again, and finally "shall be." It seems to imply both a natural evolution, reminiscent of life's journey on earth (from amphibian to mammal to human being), and something that is contrived, a succession of necessary steps that will delay the inevitable "Man" at the end – "shall be" sounds here ominously like a sword of Damocles. Yet, the sequencing of the animals at least displays the ease with which Mowgli can switch from one to the next.

His education in nature makes him the ideal epitome of the "natural man" that Rousseau aimed at describing in *Emile*. Even the endings match, as Mowgli – despite having until then preferred utter isolation to a return among mankind – finally joins back civilization the day he comes to understand the language of sexuality. Sexuality had indeed been described as the only language that Mowgli the polyglot could not master. From the moment he understands it he has no other choice but to leave the jungle forever and integrate the society of men. One can never return from the way of pleasure, at least in fiction for the young. According to Rousseau, it is the desire for a woman that makes men search for their place in society. It is a second birth. It actually marks the turning point for all three boys. Emile and Mowgli easily comply, proof of the success of their natural education, but Victor, as for him, though he is troubled by its emotions (confusion, irritation, crying, extreme joy then sadness, etc.), cannot grasp its meaning and can therefore never fit in, contrary to his fictional counterparts. Itard, after numerous reflections, will even refuse to explain it to him, preferring to leave him to his gloominess and angst, out of fear that understanding sexuality could turn him 'bestial.'

These three narratives nonetheless give the reader an idea of the narrow relations that are at play between the animal kingdom and human society. Animals are sometimes

implied to be nobler creatures than men and, in all three writings, the idea that animal life is associated with an increased freedom and liberation from constraints can be found, as well as the fact that the ability to "reach back" is only anchored in childhood – it and animality both being regarded as more primitive.

The idea of a potential hybridity between man and the animal, if more tempered nowadays than it was in the 18th and 19th centuries, continues to fascinate. Modern children's literature is still the stage of a privileged relation between the child and the animal, as was seen in the previous two chapters. So how did this concept of the hybrid evolve, and to what purpose?


(Pennac 18)


(Pennac 21)

Separated by a wire fence in a Parisian zoo, child and wolf contemplate one another in Daniel Pennac's *L'Œil du loup*. The animal, Loup Bleu (Blue Wolf) is immediately humanized. The book opens on his perspective, his thoughts. He "fronce les sourcils. Des vaguelettes de poils hérissés viennent mourir au bord de son museau. Il s'en veut de se poser toutes ces questions à propos de ce garçon. Il avait juré de ne plus jamais s'intéresser aux hommes." (13)[120] But Afrique (Africa), the child, is immutable and, from dawn to dusk, day after day, stares at the wolf inside his pen. When he decides to close one eye, mirroring the wolf physically so that he may stand equal to the animal, whose left eye is closed, a relationship of trust is established that no longer seems to be anchored

[120] He "frowns. Wavelets of hair standing on end come to die on the edge of his snout. He blames himself for wondering so much about the little boy. He had sworn to never show interest in men again."

in time. It is this confidence placed in one another that allows the plot to unveil and a sort of hybrid osmosis to take place.

Loup Bleu's eyelid actually comes to life in the story and interacts directly with Afrique. "Œil dans l'œil, tous les deux," (70)[121] a telepathy is created, a sort of fusion between the child and the animal that almost falls under the divine. They understand one another without saying a word. And so can Loup Bleu relate his story to the young boy: the snow-capped hills of Alaska, running far away from the hunters and his brothers' mischief. He narrates his own curiosity and the fascination his sister Paillette (Sparkle) felt towards men: "Non, je veux une histoire d'Homme, une vraie, une qui fait bien peur, maman, je t'en supplie, une histoire d'Homme, j'adore !" (30)[122], which one day led her to getting caught. As he was freeing her from the hunters' net, it is Loup Bleu that ended up captive, and upon waking up he opens a single eye, on the fence of a Parisian zoo. Long years of solitude, of transfers to different zoos and disdain for men and their screeching children follow, until the unfurling of images in the wolf's dilated pupil stops to only leave the little boy staring at him. A boy into whose single open eye the wolf now feels himself fall, to discover his story and why he one day decided to plant himself as a mirror in front of the animal.

When Loup Bleu asks Afrique for his name, the narrator says: "la question la plus fréquente était justement celle que le loup venait de poser à l'intérieur de sa tête. [... Or,] le garçon sait bien qu'un nom ne veut rien dire sans son histoire. C'est comme un loup dans un zoo : rien qu'une bête parmi les autres si on ne connait pas l'histoire de sa vie."

[121] "Eye in the eye, together."
[122] "No, I want a story of Man, a real one, a super scary one, mommy, I beg of you, a story of Man, I love them!"

(75-7)[123] Pennac here seems to imply that none of the words or categorizations such as names, animals or men originally mean anything. It is the definitions and intents people affix to them that create a gap, when getting to know the 'other' and learning from its story that it is not so different from us – as will Afrique and Loup Bleu do – allow the crossing necessary to the long awaited communication between the two realms of mankind and animality.

So Afrique takes his turn with the telling. He narrates how his mother got killed when he was just an infant and how Toa le Marchand (Toa the Merchant) took him in exchange for a little bit of money. Afrique then enjoys a special bond with Casseroles (Pans), the merchant's dromedary. Tao treats them both like slaves and so they become friends, support each other and communicate without a word: "Ils rigolent. Il y a longtemps qu'ils ont appris à rire en dedans. Vus de dehors, l'un et l'autre sont lisses comme les dunes." (88)[124] Animal and child are placed at the same level. They are treated the same way by the adult figure of authority and share similar modes of communication, which, as was the case with Loup Bleu, always take place inside of the characters, as if the inner selves of children and that of animals were, in essence, identical, thus allowing them to interact sensibly. Afrique also tells Loup Bleu how Toa ended up selling them both and how he became a shepherd, meeting more animals along the way: an old lion, a cheetah, a hyena and an

(Pennac 110)

[123] "The most common question was precisely the one the wolf had just asked inside of his head. [… Yet,] the boy knows very well that a name means nothing without its story. It's the same with a wolf in a zoo: just a beast among others if you don't know the story of its life."
[124] "They laugh. They have learned how to laugh on the inside a long time ago. From the outside, they are both as smooth as dunes."

Abyssinian goat, with whom he made friends. Then, dismissed and chased away by his boss, he traveled to the Green Africa of the tropical forest, paying for his sustenance by narrating stories on the wonders of Africa to the men and animals that gathered indistinctly around him (as can be seen on the image on the previous page, with the zebra, the gorilla and the chimpanzee casually sitting among men). Once he reached the Savannah, Afrique met his future adoptive parents, P'pa and M'ma Bia, who, seeing their land falling victim to deforestation, decided to leave Paris where P'pa Bia will be, as you can guess, guardian of a zoo. And, there, Afrique saw all his animal friends again, as well as Toa who was selling ice creams. That is how he met Loup Bleu, him being the only animal of the zoo he did not already know, which is why he decided to plant himself in front of the wolf until the animal would decide to "talk" to him, because, to paraphrase Pennac's narrator: what good are animals or men, if we do not know and share their story?

Thus, in this very specific relation to animals that is attributed to childhood, the reader can find hints of Gilles Deleuze's notion of affect at play. For the French philosopher, affect is like a heaving weave made of all the experiences and emotions lived by someone. It holds an intensity that gives birth to change, in all the events, people and things encountered throughout one's life. We affect and are affected, in an endless circle. We are both multiple and connected, and the affect allows for new facets of perceptions and feelings. It is a vision that Pennac tried to convey in *L'Œil du Loup*. There is a silent and internal communication between the child and the wolf, a mirroring effect between the two. The relations man/beast narrated by Pennac are entirely equal.

"C'était comme s'ils ressentaient ensemble," (110)[125] he writes of Loup Bleu and Afrique. They seem to share a core, two different lives and experiences brought together by the way they feel, by the harmony of their affects. This egalitarian vision of the two worlds betrays the human desire to cross, and/or even to completely erase, the gap that separates the men and the animals.

In the osmosis that exists between the two main characters, lies the recognition of a unity of the universe that comes to counterbalance the lingering fear of isolation of not only the hybrid but also individuals as a whole. The coming together of animality and childhood is also therapeutic as it is synonymous, for Afrique, of the recovery of a small piece of his long lost child innocence when he discovers at the zoo what happened to the other animals he had met along his journey from Africa to France. Pennac here seems to want to convey the message that what was lost can be recovered and that things and people can be redefined, both in their sameness and their otherness, the way adults get to recapture a bit of their lost childhood and freedom through text. Loup Bleu, as for him, gets to rediscover a taste for life and even decides that it is worth being seen with two eyes:

> La vérité, c'est que derrière sa paupière close, l'œil du loup est guéri depuis longtemps. Mais ce zoo, ces animaux si tristes, ces visiteurs…
>
> "Bof, s'était dit le loup, un seul œil suffit largement pour voir ça."
>
> "Oui, Loup Bleu, mais maintenant je suis là !"
>
> C'est vrai. Maintenant il y a ce garçon. Aux animaux d'Afrique, il a raconté le Grand Nord. A Loup Bleu, il a raconté les trois Afriques. Et

[125] "It is as if they were feeling together."

tous se sont mis à rêver, même quand ils ne dorment pas ! Loup Bleu regarde, pour la première fois, par-dessus l'épaule du garçon, et *il voit nettement* Paillette et le Guépard faire les fous, au milieu du zoo, dans la poudre d'or du Sahara. [...] P'pa Bia ouvre les portes de la serre, les beaux arbres de l'Afrique Verte envahissent les allées. [...] Et les visiteurs qui ne remarquent rien... [...] Et la neige qui tombe sur tout cela (en plein printemps !), la belle neige muette de l'Alaska, qui recouvre tout, et garde les secrets…


(Pennac 154)

"Evidemment, pense Loup Bleu, évidemment, c'est tentant, ça mérite d'être vu avec les deux yeux."

"Clic !" fait la paupière du loup en s'ouvrant.

"Clic !" fait la paupière du garçon. (152-4)[126]

The encounter between the world of the human and that of the animal proves therapeutic to both. The healing can only happen thanks to the inner dialogue and

[126] "The truth is that, behind his closed eyelid, the wolf's eye had healed a long time ago. But this zoo, these animals so sad, these visitors... / "Meh, the wolf had thought, one eye is more than enough to see that." / "Yes, Loup Bleu, but I am here now!" / It is true. Now there is this boy. To the animals from Africa he told stories of the Far North. To Loup Bleu, he spoke of the three Africas. And all started to dream, even when they are not sleeping! Loup Bleu looks, for the first time, and *he can clearly see* Paillette and the Cheetah frolic wildly, in the middle of the zoo, on the golden powder of the Sahara. [...] P'pa Bia opens the doors of the greenhouse, and the beautiful trees of Green Africa invade the aisles. [...] And the visitors do not notice a thing... [...] And snow starts falling on top of all that (in the middle of the spring!), the beautiful silent snow of the Alaska that covers everything and keeps all secrets... / "Of course, thinks Loup Bleu, of course, it's tempting, it's worth seeing with two eyes." / "Clic!" the wolf's eyelid makes as it opens. / "Clic!" does the boy's eyelid."

comprehension that the two characters share. It is the affect in which they partake that allows their mutual recovery. As Deleuze explains, affect is produced by the idea of an object that is beneficial to the individual, or in agreement with his/her nature. In the case of Pennac's novel it is not an object but the mirroring stillness that the two protagonists have in common. Their mimetic action is what gives birth to their starting to share with each other, to join in affect. And, just as Deleuze's notion of affect is one that will be the source of a power increase in its wake, the affect-ed encounter of Afrique and Loup Bleu is what allows their mutual reconstruction as whole beings.

Pennac's story offers its readers a vision of childhood and animality as tightly linked, even somewhat interchangeable. It is almost the depiction of a spiritual hybridity, so to say. Thanks to this metaphysical union, the abject that stained both Mowgli and Victor, despite their hybrid powers, is overcome in Pennac's narrative. Only in fiction can this interchangeability occur. Afrique's hybridity gives birth to an alternative world, a universe of the possible – even if it is only through daydreaming and imagination, as the last excerpt from the book revealed. Snow, sand and articulated trees did not actually invade the zoo, nor did Loup Bleu's sister made an impromptu appearance. Yet this metaphorical imagery reveals something deeper. Indeed, in the novel, hybridity is no longer a fusion but a true understanding between nature and society, a way for children readers to experience – and reflect upon – different ways of being in the world. The abject gave way to affect.

Whether it comes to Mowgli, Victor, Afrique or Loup Bleu, they all reveal a very deep – and adult – desire to cross the chasm that exists between human society and the

animal kingdom. Desire for communication, liberation, and primitive power but also for superior understanding, woven with fear and a rejection of the liminal condition this crossing might bring, animality does not cease to fascinate. Naturally, the concept of animality is in constant evolution and children's literature – because it offers a space of variations and porosity between the human and the animal – allows authors to play with this liminality and gives birth to a new reflection. The literary animal seems as much a source of adult covetousness as it is a force initiating the resolving of childhood problems – such as fear of abandonment, rejection of parental authority or gender confusion.

Indeed, recent studies on transgender children (i.e. children whose biological sex does not correspond to the idea they have of their own identity) have established a strong fascination of said children for the hybrid creatures that are mermaids. Gender is a very important theme of children's literature and scholarly research on the genre, yet the topic of gender-hybridity is still rarely dealt with. It is thus quite interesting that the closeness transgender-mermaid has originated from the readers themselves. The mirroring effect of children's literature is quite noticeable here in its two-sidedness. The genre might sometimes indeed be as influenced by its audience as its readers are by the stories. Literature and media for the young tend to teach from an early age what it is like to be a boy or a girl, what tastes to develop, how to behave, etc. Pink or blue, dolls or cars, dresses or pants, society can sometimes constrict children to certain gender roles. Yet inner awareness is likely to be a more complicated affair. Little boys will often borrow their sister's dolls and little girls tend to sneak in their brother's room to play with toy cars. American gender specialist Judith Butler theorized that, rather than being natural or

innate, gender is merely a series of stylized acts and of behaviors endlessly repeating themselves until they give the illusion of authenticity. (214-5)

In the case of transgender children, the problem encountered is that they do not – just like the hybrid protagonists of fiction – fit into this binary categorization implanted by society, this illusion of authenticity. Transgender representations are not very common in stories for children, but that does not mean they are entirely absent from them either. It is important to note that, in most cases, the "transgenrism" of children or teenagers that is displayed in fiction for the young deals with a girl dressing as a boy, often to circumvent stereotypes related to gender and to gain access to a power and freedom that otherwise would not have been reachable. And here again, the figure of hybridity is shown as tightly linked to a notion of power. Nevertheless, when the reverse occurs, that is when a boy dons girl clothing, it is often either to create a comic effect, or to mark the homosexuality of the protagonist.

But children's literature has been striving to get rid of such clichés in the last decade and it is quite remarkable to notice that the answer to the questioning of authors and editors came from the readers themselves. "No one knows precisely why some people are transgender, says Herb Schreier, a psychiatrist who treats transgender and gender-variant youths at Children's Hospital & Research Center Oakland in California. It may have to do with biology, genetics, or a woman's hormone levels during pregnancy. What is clear, he says, is that people appear to be transgender from birth."[127]

A study conducted in 2008-2009 on the transgender population of the United Kingdom revealed that, out of the 121 participants, all declared the age of realization of a

[127] Rochman, Sue. *Transgender Teens – Current Health 2, Human Sexuality Supplement*. February 2008. Volume 34, No. 6. Print. 1

discrepancy between their biological sex and the gender to which they identified to be around four, five or six years old.[128] The study also showed that the literary or cinematic character to which male-to-female transgender children related to the most was that of the mermaid. This liminal being representing the double identity human/fish gives transgender children a space, also liminal, where they do not need to worry about what resides below the waist. The mermaid is a composite creature that exists both in the animal sphere and the human one. Transgender children recognize themselves in the struggle and sacrifices that characters like Hans Christian Andersen's little mermaid have to face in order to become full-bodied women.

Jazz, a transgendered girl of then eight years old explained in a 2009 interview that she felt as though she was simply born in the wrong body. As for her passion for mermaids, she said: "Jazz: It's because I don't have to worry about what's around, like, the private area. / Liz Hayes [the reporter]: OK, so yes, it's... the mermaid could be anybody? / Jazz: Yeah." And this is why the child felt that it was a character with which she could identify, more so than with any other fictional entities. In the same interview, American sex therapist, Dr. Marilyn Volker, who has done extensive close work with transgender children added: "When I ask children to draw a picture of themselves, draw a picture of what they like, many, many trans-children will draw mermaids. They have tails; they have no genitalia."[129]. The liminal space that literature offers to children thus seems to allow them to better understand and accept their differences, as well as to help them prepare for the obstacles that they will face as they grow.

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[128] Study conducted under the direction of Natasha Kennedy and transcribed in: Hellen, Mark, and Natasha Kennedy. *Transgender children: more than a theoretical challenge.* Graduate Journal of Social Science December 2010, Volume 7, Issue 2. 25-43. Print. 27-8

[129] 60 minutes. *My Secret Self*. Interview conducted by Liz Hayes. September 4th, 2009. <http://sixtyminutes.ninemsn.com.au/stories/858237/ my-secret-self>. Web.

And the figure of the mermaid is well on the verge of becoming a trope for dealing with children's sexuality in literature. French illustrator for children Sophie Adde told me in an interview that she and many of her colleagues had started to identify the phenomenon in the last five years. She revealed the awe she felt at the thought that the genre of children's literature could still grow and change, and how much of an inspiration children were to it. The mermaid phenomenon, she said, was something she could not have predicted and that intrigued her deeply.

> Of course, mermaids aren't new to children's literature. I mean, Disney's Ariel is iconic, but now they are no longer mere Barbie-like creatures targeting girly girls only. Now, you see the emergence of an actual reflection or a kind of philosophy behind the scales. There is something really freeing in not having to be or act like a certain gender, and I think it's great that children came to rock the boat and change our conceptions, you know. Sure, there is sill a huge amount of pink glittery sea creatures, but there is a hint of something more, that I personally can't wait to see grow in the future.[130]

Liminality comes from the Latin word 'limen,' meaning threshold. It is a condition characterized by ambiguity, uncertainty and instability that nonetheless offers a faculty of adaptability, fluidity and superior understanding of the two spaces between which it is to be found. Liminality and hybridity fascinate as much as they repulse. They represent at the same time dynamism and vacillation. Hybridity forces us to digress from

[130] Interview collected on November 28th, 2012 at the 28th Salon du livre et de la presse jeunesse in Montreuil. Courtesy of Sophie Adde.

what we take for granted and to open ourselves to new possibilities of what the world could be. It is often lived in children's literature as an act of self-liberation, but also presents an isolating aspect. Narratives of hybridity seem to convey the message that there is no real gap between human society and the animal kingdom. They are entities of one and the same reality. In understanding the relation that exists between "bestiality" and civilization, a wisdom bringing humans closer to the mysteries of life can be developed. Hybridity is the recognition of a unity of the universe and of an interdependency of all sentient things. Emblems of a threshold between two worlds, aftermath of dangers but also symbols of escape and liberation, the avatars of animality hold a crucial place in children's literature. Animality is a direct reflection of childhood in the literature that targets it. Its mirroring effect calls into question the values of adult civilization and thus plays a crucial role in the future growth of its readers. It also sometimes reveals a lot more about the adult behind the page than the child.

Hybridity and liminality are powerful concepts in children's literature and that since the 19th century. They embody an in-between that frightens by virtue of its capacity to evade all attempts of categorization but they also allow the young readers to discover a variety of things, and to themselves be multiple, without erecting their own barriers. Figurative hybridity can then become a source of not only power but also of spiritual grandeur. "Children's literature, which likes hybrid and fantastic creatures, let itself be infected by this hybridity: it is on the one hand a game of recognition, and on the other hand an experimental work. [I]t is on one hand a refuge, persistence and echo, and on the other audacity, imprudence and creation." (Prince 194) Children's literature is indeed a hybrid in itself: written for children by adults, inspired by the way children are while still

trying to teach them what being a child should be like, highly didactic yet entertaining, both constricting and freeing, it is a peculiar thing, the true aim of which is sometimes difficult to grasp.

Chapter 7:

"Et tu es une fleur de ce bouquet, comme le poisson, comme le litchi et comme l'oiseau:" learning to learn through stories[131]

Learning always seems to be at the core of children's literature. Through the books that target them, children are taught how to play, how to count, how to read images and letters, how to embrace all that they are – as well as everything they could grow to be, or what they never will – but, most importantly, they are basically expected to learn how to learn.

In teaching their young audience how to love, how to stand up for themselves or ask for help, what to fear and how to behave, authors of children's literature place them in an educational setting. A playful one, certainly, as was previously seen in this dissertation, yet with an equally undeniable strong building flair to it. It is fairly easy to recognize how the teaching of elementary logic with primary colors and basic shapes is operated in picture books such as Bruna's *Miffy* series (as was presented in chapter 4), but the extent of the knowledge concealed in children's literature goes far beyond the construction of a structural education. Indeed, the cognitive strategy of knowledge assimilation used by Bruna and many of his contemporaries is not limited to primitive imagery codes and repetition. On the contrary, the learning transcends such classroom didacticism and tackles emotional education as well.

[131] "And you are a flower of this bouquet, just like the fish, the litchi and the bird." Delecour, François, and Sophie Adde. *Linh et la fleur du bonheur*. Paris : Le Buveur d'Encre, 2011. Print. 23

Learning how to feel, but also how to be aware of what one feels is one of the main tasks children's literature has set upon itself. From fear to love, kinship and even sexual awakening, it aims at covering the entire spectrum of emotions the child has to discover and comprehend in order to grow. "The characters of picture books for children and realistic fictions of teenage literature evoke all the fundamental issues of human psyche, just like tales restitute the tragic dimension of human existence," concurs Rolland (201).

One of the strongest emotions of childhood, inhabiting every single dark corner, is fear. "When children are left alone in the dark, their bodies respond by sending signals of fear, isolation and disorientation, but it is stories that populate that dark with monsters," argues David Rudd in *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature* (76). The world of children's literature, like childhood itself, is populated with monsters, deaths, anxieties and fears. In truth, violence has been a part of the literature dedicated to the young for a long time.

> Violence, like a thin but noticeable thread, runs through every inch of the fabric of children's literature. Children of ancient Greece heard horrific tales of gods such as Cronus […]. Abandonment, decapitations, disemboweling, serial murders, and poisonings were everyday fare in the folktales of the Middle Ages. Even in prudish Victorian times, barbaric torture and gore in literature were considered character-forming for young readers and were all the rage. (Lehr 39)

Violence in actual literature aimed at children can be traced down to the 17th century where it abounded in fairy tales. There, one witnesses the apparition of a moralizing and traumatizing fear for educational purposes. Tales were often cruel (in their original versions) and aimed at scaring children into behaving well. If many a person remembers modern takes on *Little Red Riding Hood*, very few actually know that, in Charles Perrault's original – written – version, the little girl is devoured by the wolf (who had already engulfed her grandmother) and that this is how the story ends. No hunter runs to open the belly of the beast and free the child and her grandmother, both magically still alive. The same applies to the Danish tale written by Hans Christian Andersen, *The Little Mermaid*. In the story, the young mermaid, wounded to see the prince marry another in spite of all the sacrifices she made for him, actually takes her own life:

> Her tender feet felt as if cut with sharp knives, but she cared not for it; a sharper pang had pierced through her heart. She knew this was the last evening she should ever see the prince, for whom she had forsaken her kindred and her home; she had given up her beautiful voice, and suffered unheard-of pain daily for him, while he knew nothing of it. […] She cast one more lingering, half-fainting glance at the prince, and then threw herself from the ship into the sea, and thought her body was dissolving into foam.[132]

[132] Andersen, Hans Christian. *The Little Mermaid*. Salt Lake City: Project Gutenberg, 2008 (1835). Ebook. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/27200/27200-h/27200-h.htm#li_merma>

Why bother reading such a story to children, one could wonder? In order to try and prevent little girls from straying or talking to strangers, at the risk of being raped and killed, as Perrault's morale so openly – and didactically – states:

> On voit ici que de jeunes enfants, / Surtout de jeunes filles, / Belles, bien faites et gentilles, / Font très mal d'écouter toute sorte de gens, / Et que ce n'est pas chose étrange / S'il en est tant que le loup mange. / Je dis le loup, car tous les loups / Ne sont pas de la même sorte : / Il en est d'une humeur accorte, / Sans bruit, sans fiel et sans courroux, / Qui, privés, complaisants et doux, / Suivent les jeunes demoiselles / Jusque dans les maisons, jusque dans les ruelles. / Mais, hélas ! Qui ne sait que ces loups doucereux / De tous les loups sont les plus dangereux ![133]

Or, with Andersen's story, the violence was intended to prevent young girls from giving in before marriage, so that their now satisfied suitors would not reject them, bringing dishonor on their families along the way. Perrault was a firm believer in the didactic power of tales and had thus written as a preface – and justification for such cruelties – to his own writings:

> Partout la vertu y est récompensée, et partout le vice y est puni. Ils tendent tous à faire voir l'avantage qu'il y a d'être honnête, patient, avisé, laborieux, obéissant, et le mal qui arrive à ceux qui ne le sont pas. […] Quelques frivoles et bizarres que soient toutes ces fables dans leurs

[133] Perrault, Charles. *Œuvres*. Paris: Editions La Bibliothèque Digitale, 2013 (1697). Ebook.
"From this story one learns that children, / Especially young lasses, / Pretty, courteous and well-bred, / Do very wrong to listen to strangers, / And it is not an unheard thing / If the Wolf is thereby provided with his dinner. / I say Wolf, for all wolves / Are not of the same sort; / There is one kind with an amenable disposition / Neither noisy, nor hateful, nor angry, / But tame, obliging and gentle, / Following the young maids / In the streets, even into their homes. / Alas! who does not know that these gentle wolves / Are of all such creatures the most dangerous!" Translated by A.E. Johnson in Perrault, Charles. *Perrault's Fairy Tales.* Hertforshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2004 (1697). Print. 69

> aventures, il est certain qu'elles excitent dans les enfants le désir de ressembler à ceux qu'ils voient devenir heureux et en même temps la crainte des malheurs où les méchants sont tombés par leur méchanceté. […] Ce sont des semences qu'on jette qui ne produisent d'abord que des mouvements de joie et de tristesse, mais il ne manque guère d'éclore de bonnes inclinations.[134]

Folktales and fairytales encompass brutal allegorical lessons, yet these are considered necessary to monitor the impact that fear has on children and its evolution in the context of children's literature. "Fairy tales underwent severe criticism when the new discoveries of psychoanalysis and child psychology revealed just how violent, anxious, destructive, and even sadistic a child's imagination is. A young child, for example, not only loves his parents with an incredible intensity of feeling, but at times also hates them. […] Fairy tales speak to the inner mental life of the child." (Bettelheim 120)

In the 20th century the use of fear in literature for the young reached a turning point. Indeed, from a petrifying warning, writers drifted towards working on children's feelings of insecurity, which will invariably lead to a confrontation intended to allow the mastering of their fears – still for educational purposes. Children have always been more or less fascinated by horror. In an interview, American author Jonathan Messinger declared: "People think, Hey I love kids, I want to write children's books. But they think

[134] "Virtue is always rewarded in them and vice is always punished. They all try to show the advantages of being honest, patient, prudent, diligent, and obedient, and the evil which overtakes those who are not. [...] However frivolous and odd the events in all these tales may be, they definitely instill in children the wish to be like the people they see become happy, and, at the same time, fear of the misfortune into which malicious people have fallen through their malice. [...] These are seeds being sown; at first they produce only spurts of joy or sadness, but they seldom fail to result in a propensity for good." Translated by Appelbaum, Stanley in Perrault Charles. *The Fairy Tales in Verse and Prose: A Dual Language Book*. New York: Dover Publications, 2002 (1694/1697). Print. 6

children are happy. That's their first mistake."[135] Childhood is a world inhabited by wondrous wonders but also by unnamable grim shadows. Terror, in the context of children's literature, is a way to both awaken and tame fears. It has become a pedagogical, therapeutic and recreational device, entertaining children while allowing them to conquer their apprehensions. The text is regarded as an instrument permitting the young readers to purge bad thoughts but also to find satisfaction in seeing their fears confronted, mastered and banished. Discussing the outlawing of traditional tales due to the violence they entailed, Bruno Bettelheim felt the need to defend the very essentiality of their barbaric nature, which, according to him, helped children face the monster that they "fe[lt] or fear[ed themselves] to be." Denying children the opportunity to unveil, reflect upon and toy with their own villainy through the "form and body" tales could give them would only condemn said children to remain helpless victims of their "worst anxieties," argued Bettelheim. Tales are supposed to give their readers the keys to ridding themselves of these monsters, may they be inner or outer. "If our fear of being devoured takes the tangible form of a witch, it can be gotten rid of by burning her in the oven!" (Bettelheim 120)

Nowadays, the handling of fear in fiction for the young is slightly subtler, if still owning up to similar intents. "Children [are] pursued, and there are many scenes of darkness and night, filled with horror: fear of exposure and paranoia abound. […] There is a sense of things being out of control, added by the fact that the 'supernatural' is not now part of any scheme, moral, educational or comic, but is simply a random irruption of malignity." (Manlove 200) One of the most recurring themes of horror is the figure of the

[135] Messinger, Jonathan. "Guilt for dinner: The Mo Willems Interview." *Time Out Chicago*, May 5th 2011. <http://www.timeout.com/chicago/kids/activities/guilt-for-dinner-the-mo-willems-interview>. Web.

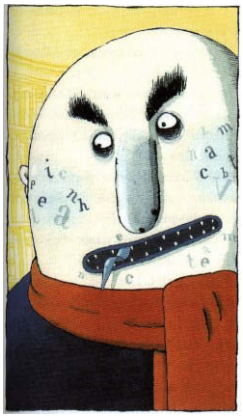
vampire. Bram Stocker's *Dracula* naturally comes to mind, as well as the American teenage heartthrobs of the *Twilight* series, yet France and its fiction for the young are not left behind when it comes to bloodsuckers. If the theme is commonly shared, one cannot help but notice that the treatment it undergoes differs greatly.

Indeed, in Stocker's eponymous novel, Dracula, not satisfied with nursing the characters' blood, also solely curdles the readers'. It is a story of dread that arouses both pity for lost love and terror. *Twilight*'s vampires, as for them, actually sparkle in the sunlight and their vegetarianism, along with their preternatural beauties, ignite hormonal teenage girls. Miles from these Anglo-Saxon examples, the vampire of French youth literature is but a symbol. It is of course a troubling and often threatening figure, nevertheless it is more so due to its allegorical side than to the bestiality normally bestowed upon it. And it is not romanticized into a myth of "forbidden desire meets true love," either.

The French vampire is a thief, threatening identity and loved ones. "It is as though modern children no longer feel their identities so secure, but that they are now capable of leaching away into some more intense being and purpose than they possess," writes Colin Manlove of the staggering presence of vampires in children's fiction. (174) Theft and loss are recurring motives in French vampiric fiction for the young. As of now the inquiry I conducted with French editors has not provided any clear answer as to why. They identify the specificity of the vampire figure in French literature for the young as an actual phenomenon, yet cannot explain it.[136]

In Eric Sanvoisin's *Le Buveur d'encre* (The Ink Drinker), first book of the *Draculivre* series, for age 7 and up, the vampire stands for the fear of losing what makes

[136] Please read the interviews of editors in the appendices for further information on the topic.



the self of the child. The young protagonist, of whom the reader never learns the name, tells the story – in a first person narrative – of how he came to meet Draculivre (a bookish twist on the name Dracula: 'livre' means 'book' in French), the book-thirsty vampire who has developed a terrible and unfortunate allergy to blood, you see. The little narrator is the son of a librarian who is passionate about books – "Papa est libraire. Il adore les livres. Il les dévore. C'est un ogre. Il lit toute la journée et parfois même la nuit. C'est une maladie incurable mais ça n'a pas l'air d'inquiéter notre médecin de famille. [...] Tous les bouquins sont ses copains." (7-8) – when he, for one, truly hates reading: "Moi, je n'ai pas de copain. Et je n'aime pas les livres." (8)[137] A statement that remains true until the day when a mysterious client, with teeth like sergeant major quill nibs, enters his father's store and he gets to witness his very first vampire feeding, with a straw – for Sanvoisin's vampire does know manners:

> Le teint gris, [...] on dirait qu'il flotte à dix centimètres du sol. [...] Subitement, il a saisi un p'tit bouquin et tout est devenu encore plus fou. Il ne l'a pas ouvert. Il a seulement écarté les pages du milieu et là, dans la fente ainsi pratiquée, il a planté une paille tout juste sortie de sa poche. Sa bouche s'est mise à aspirer. Sur son visage, il y avait du plaisir comme si le

[137] "Dad is a bookseller. He loves books. He devours them. He is an ogre. He reads all day and sometimes all night too. It is an incurable disease but it does not seem to worry our family doctor. [...] All books are his friends." / "I, for one, don't have friends. And I don't like books."

> livre contenait du jus d'orange et des glaçons. [... Il] s'est dirigé vers la sortie. Aussitôt, j'ai bondi de ma cachette pour examiner le livre dans lequel la paille s'était plantée. [...] J'ai failli m'évanouir. Il était vide. Sur les pages, il ne restait pas le plus petit mot. L'étrange client avait bu toute l'encre du livre. (11-5)[138]

A vampire that sucks stories out of books, Draculivre is truly an imagination thief, quenching his thirst at the cost of many a fictitious adventure lost. Sanvoisin's vampire takes pleasure in literally draining the life of the story, leaving nothing in its wake. The somewhat amusing allegory of an ink-thirsty vampire, drinking from a straw, is a gentle way to express the dread of death and disappearance children may experience. Childhood is full of monsters in dark corners – be it those of the child's mind or outside threats – waiting to pounce on the child and devour it into oblivion, the way Draculivre did with the text of the little book.

Despite being scared out of his wits, the young boy protagonist decides, on a thrilling impulse of curiosity, to follow the vampire all the way down to his cemetery residence where naturally he gets bitten. When he wakes up in his father's bookstore, from what he thought must have been a nightmare, he feels compelled to bleed a novel dry. Utterly panicked at the idea of having lost what used to define his self and of now needing to hide his true nature from his parents for the rest of his life, the young boy soon discovers that it is actually his newfound uniqueness that will bring him closer to his dad.

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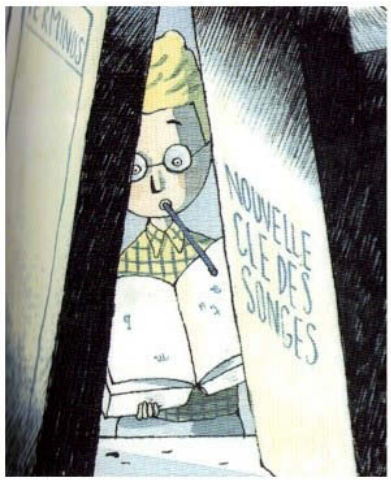
[138] "Grey complexion, [...] he looks like he's hovering three inches above ground. [...] Suddenly, he grabbed a small book and things got even crazier. He didn't open it. He just spread open the middle pages and there, in the slit it created, he planted a straw he had just taken out of his pocket. His mouth began to suck. On his face, there was pleasure, as if the book was made of orange juice with ice. [... He] headed towards the exit. Straight away I jumped out of my hiding place to examine the book in which the straw had been stuck. [...] I almost fainted. It was empty. On the pages, there was not the slightest word left. The strange client had drunk all of the book's ink."

Indeed, when they could not have been more different before – "De l'extérieur, je ressemble à papa. Mais à l'intérieur, alors là, nous sommes deux étrangers," (8) – the child can now relate to his father and be regaled by the stories as he drinks them:



"Le plus étonnant était que la saveur qui inondait ma langue variait suivant les mots et les passages du texte. Ce n'était pas l'encre elle-même que j'absorbais mais de l'aventure à l'état pur." (38)[139] Changing, – in a not so subtle metaphor to growing up, – has developed the young character's sense of self, expanding it to new horizons and a wider range of feelings, rather than obliterating it.

Pierre Bottero also opted to write about vampires in *Fils de sorcières*. Aimed at readers aged 9 to 11, the vampire of Bottero's novel is a symbol of the loss of self-confidence and family comfort zone. The book tells the story of young boy narrator, Jean Sylvestre, who is the only male in a family of powerful, yet kind, witches. As his mother and six aunts are attacked by a mysterious "buveur de magie" (magic drinker), Jean must step up to bring his family back to life and protect his younger sister. The vampire of the story is also described as gliding, almost floating above ground, in a similar fashion to Sanvoisin's Draculivre. Yet their aim is different. Draculivre appeared at first to be sucking creativity and imagination but proved rather harmless, when Bottero's magic drinker seems to be pure evil and closer to the original vampire myth.

[139] "From the outside, I look like dad. But inside, you see, we are two strangers." / "The most surprising was that the flavor that was flooding my tongue varied depending on the words and passages of the text. It wasn't the actual ink I was absorbing but pure, raw adventure."

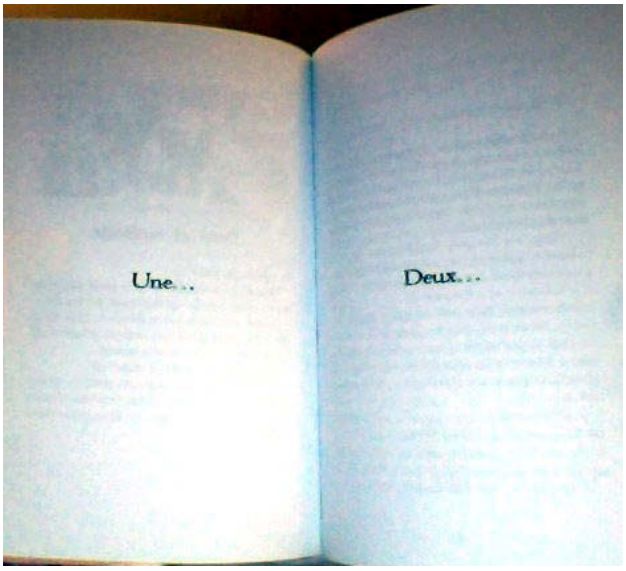
Before being reduced to a lifeless Barbie-like doll that might crumble to dust and disappear after a few weeks – which is what happens when the creature gets a hold of someone's magic, – Jean's mother explained to him:

> Un buveur de magie, c'est l'ennemi des sorcières. C'est laid, méchant et terriblement dangereux ! […] Leur vie est vide, ils ne font rien, ne s'intéressent à rien et n'ont aucune qualité. Ils n'ont qu'une peur, mourir, et qu'une obsession, prolonger leur misérable existence. Le plus possible ! A tout prix ! Ils ne sont pas humains, pourtant ils ressemblent à des hommes sauf qu'ils ont un gros nez qui fait penser à une trompe. Ils s'en servent pour boire notre pouvoir. (59-60)[140]

There is no actual bite but Bottero's vampire can drain the essence of witches with his abnormally large nose, which is also reminiscent of Draculivre's straw technique. Yet the most interesting part is not the physical description or the putrid smell of death that seems to linger around the vampire but his psychological portrait. Indeed, the magic drinker is the definition of emptiness. Him and his kind know no emotions or desires, besides that of staying alive. They do not enjoy life but merely keep at it, for

[140] "A magic drinker is the enemy of witches. It's ugly, mean and terribly dangerous! [...] Their lives are empty, they do nothing, are not interested in anything and do not have a single quality. They only have one fear, to die, and one obsession, to extend their miserable existences. As much as possible! At any cost! They are not human, yet they look like men apart from their large nose, reminiscent of a trunk. They use it to drink our power."

presence's sake. They are selfish creatures; incapable of love and lifeless in the way they live the lives they steal.



Jean and his sister Lisa are left alone and actually so terrorized that the narrator declares needing a page or two to recover, which the book editor compliantly grants, offering relief to both characters and readers by adapting the pace to the target audience of the novel. (86-7)

Once they feel better, Jean decides to call his absentee father for help and the three of them embark on a private investigation adventure. Finally they get to the creature's lair and defeat it with the help of the kids' witch grandmother, by twisting its nose until the stolen magic blasts out and he is reduced to dust. A rather simplistic and predictable outcome, with the mother and aunts restored to their humanity, yet what matters is the purpose of the vampire trope.

Again, in a similar fashion to the *Draculivre* series, the figure of the vampire offers reassurance in the face of change. Because of him, Jean finds the courage to reach out to the father that left them because the aunts did not approve of him and he had issues adapting to the weird occurrences of magic. Fear can be positive and is the source of Jean's family newfound unity. In discussing their problems and finding a common enemy, they all grow to accept one another despite their differences – or their normality. Bottero aimed at teaching his audience that support is essential and no so-called

abnormality can stand in the way of love. The latter comes to counterbalance fear and allows the protagonist to reflect on the importance of forgiveness: "[Papa] nous a abandonnés, mais on lui pardonne et votre avis ne peut rien y changer. Vous êtes mes taties et je vous aime, mais lui, c'est mon père et je le garde !" (175)[141] He willingly grants it to his father, insisting on kinship, and subtly divulging to the readers that they can rest assured of the many times he will also be on the receiving end of forgiveness as he grows and makes mistakes too, just like the readers will. In Bottero's novel fear is but a way to tighten the safety net of his characters. From a severely dysfunctional family unit to learning that mistakes can be corrected or forgiven, and that there will always be someone to support the young characters or catch them when they fall, Pierre Bottero truly toys with the intricate range of dismay a child might experience. The vampiric imagery allows the author to tackle loss, abandonment, separation and misunderstandings, so that these emotions may be discussed and eventually resolved in the symbolic collapse of the "buveur de magie."

In Maëlle Fierpied's *Chroniques de l'Université Invisible*, family safety is completely forgone. The novel opens with this dedication, which sets the tone: "Pour toi qui te reconnaîtras dans cette citation : Eadem mutata resurgo," inciting the readers to see themselves in Swiss mathematician Jacques Bernoulli's maxim, "though changed, I arise the same." This time aimed at pre-adolescents and teenagers, the novel narrates the story of two girls and one boy, all gifted with superhuman powers.

Fourteen year-old Framboise (i.e. Raspberry) is the character I will focus on for she, lo and behold, happens to be captured by none others than vampires. Plagued with

[141] "[Dad] abandoned us, but we forgive him and nothing you say can change that. You are my aunties and I love you but he's my dad and I'm keeping him!"

bad luck and accident-prone since early childhood, Framboise meets the cryptic Dante as he walks her home after a roller-skating incident. Following that episode, the girl's family seems strangely intent on having her meet the man again, so much so that her mother simply hands her over to him one night, never to see her again.

Held prisoner to a coven of two (Dante and his friend Moustafa, also known as Moustache), the young girl soon learns that she can practice telekinesis and, despite her profound distress at being sequestrated, does not realize right away that her kidnappers are vampires: "J'eus, avant de monter l'escalier, la vision fugitive de Dante jetant à son compagnon deux paquets opaques remplis d'un liquide rouge sombre que je pris pour de la soupe. J'entendis le rire de Moustache "Ah, ah, ah ! D'la soupe ! C'est la meilleure ! Elle est rigolote cette gamine !" mais je n'eus pas le temps d'y réfléchir plus." (118)[142] If we later learn that vampires only drink blood because they tend to suffer from anemia, what the narrator reveals in this short passage is that Fierpied's vampires can actually read people's minds and influence both their thoughts and the decisions they make. Framboise learns that the hard way as she contemplates an escape, in spite of having been warned not to leave: "[Dante] répéta mentalement sa mise en garde : *Interdiction de quitter le hangar !* Ce qui eut pour conséquence de me la marquer en lettres de feu dans le cerveau." (115)[143] The vampire thus robbed the young protagonist of her free will.

Framboise is later taken by another group, intent on bringing her to the Invisible University, where she will learn to understand and master her powers. Her new guards are the ones that unveil the mystery: "Dante est un vampire. Et Moustafa aussi. […] Ce

[142] "I got, before climbing the stairs, the fleeting vision of Dante throwing his companion two abstruse packages filled with a dark red liquid that I gathered to be soup. I heard Moustache's laugh "Ah, ah, ah! Soup! That's the best yet! That kid's funny!" but I did not have time to think about it some more."
[143] "[Dante] mentally repeated his warning: I forbid you to leave the warehouse! Which, as a consequence, imprinted it in letters of fire on my brain."

sont aussi des anomalies génétiques, mais à un point extrême." (129)[144] Despite their pale and surly appearances, Fierpied's vampires seem to blend in entirely with the rest of the population, their differences located closer to the soul than the body. They can possess the mind of another and create an illusion from within, the victim left helpless to the vampire's will, eyes glazed over and paralyzed.

Dante and his kin are a *mise en scène* of external influences on the growing mind of a child. They can be taken as a symbolization of the peer pressure experienced by young teenagers and exhort the readers into forming their own opinions over things, as well as protect their thoughts and free will from others who might not always have their best interest at heart. Fierpied's vampires encourage the audience to be less gullible as they grow, and to question the commonplaces they have been lulled into – as well as the many other clichés and judgments they are doomed to encounter in their future lives. The vampires stand for outside threats but also for the battle within, which is why they are immersed in a grey area, neither good nor bad, the way people actually are, in and out of fiction, children included. As Dante explained:

> Je peux éprouver des sentiments, avoir des enfants, être blessé et mourir. Je ne suis pas un monstre. […] Vous voulez tout savoir de moi ? Vous voudriez que je vous rassure. Que je vous dise que je suis normal, que je n'ai jamais fait de mal à personne et que je suis doux comme un agneau. Ce n'est pas le cas. Mais est-ce que vous connaissiez tout de Léon

[144] "Dante is a vampire. So is Moustafa. [...] These also are genetic anomalies, but to the extreme."

> et Franky [i.e. the second group of kidnappers, from the University] quand vous leur avez fait confiance ? […] Non. (269-70)[145]

Appearances may lull into a false sense of comfort, tricking youngsters into relying on the wrong person. Also, no one is purely good or completely evil. Only in acknowledging that can Framboise – and her readers – always arise changed but the same.

These three variations on the vampire theme let us see that whatever age the target audience is, in French children's literature, vampirism allows the exploitation of the fear of abandonment and loss in youngsters. Depending on the age of the reader, what the vampire drinks varies but the looming threat remains similar, as well as the lesson to be learned about oneself.

> Each text becomes an enabling device, allowing readers to work through their fears and to purge themselves of hostile feelings and damaging desires. By entering the world of fantasy and imagination, children and adults secure for themselves a safe space where fears can be confronted, mastered and banished. […] In bringing to life the dark figures of our imagination as ogres, witches, cannibals, [vampires] and giants, [these stories] may stir up dread, but in the end they always supply the pleasure of seeing it, [and what it stands for,] vanquished [or conquered]. (Tatar xiv)

[145] "I can experience feelings, have children, get hurt and die. I am not a monster. [...] You want to know everything about me? You would like me to reassure you. To tell you that I am normal, that I never hurt anyone and that I am as gentle as a lamb. That's not the case. But did you know everything about Léon and Franky [i.e. the second group of kidnappers, from the University] when you decided to trust them? [...] No."

Violence is a part of the human condition that children's literature aims at depicting, explaining, and teaching in its stories. Through symbolization, children are given the opportunity to reflect upon their most hidden desires and anxieties. Confronted with the strong emotions experienced by the stories' characters, the readers are invited to understand the importance of knowing and expressing oneself. Fear, in children's literature, not only holds a strong therapeutic quality – as a way to both excite and overcome the readers' fears – but also strives toward helping children articulate their own thoughts, beliefs and values.

Children's literature wishes itself to be entertaining but also, and maybe even mostly, educational. Fear is one the main factors of the genre, yet it does not stand alone in the scope of passions that animate childhood and its literature. Love is just as crucial to it, and dons many forms, since it is about teaching children, real and fictional, to be open to all things and all others. Amongst these loving surges can be found the recently popular respect for nature, as well as the more classic and enduring: smiling at life under all circumstances, growing a sense of familial belonging and, naturally, awakening to amorous feelings. "Reading feeds the imagining force, [… it] exacerbates sensation [and] gives birth to emotion," emphasizes Annie Rolland (202)

Through storying, children's literature tries to articulate an education that protects, and teaches to protect oneself and others, with an education that demonstrates the keys to recognizing and adhering to a healthy relationship. One of the relationships that children's literature has been fervently trying to instigate in its readers for the past ten years has to do with environmental consciousness. Indeed, the market now abounds

with what is openly labeled as "ecoliterature." The latter offers a variety of ecological discourses that range from documentaries for children using a microscope (or "effet de loupe") technique to give a highly detailed account of plants or insects for instance, to the more elusive metaphorical fables on life and happiness.

Discussing this trend with French illustrator Sophie Adde, while she was promoting one of these metaphorical tales at the 28th Salon du livre et de la presse jeunesse in Montreuil, she assessed:

> Children always seem so busy living life. I think that's partly why edition for children started marketing stories on what life is and how to preserve it. Well, you know, that and all of the natural catastrophes, the climate changes and the human impact on the planet that keep making the news, which led writers and illustrators to want to educate children to a better future. Ah, and of course, there is also the influence and growing popularity of things such as yoga and Buddhism that try to bring balance to the stressful modern life we lead. I think we just want to draw children's attention to the fact that life and nature are a treasure, and get reminded of it as well, as adults, as we read along.[146]

Nature is truly omnipresent and alive in narratives for children. The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st have indeed seen the rise of an accrued awareness of the environment and what needs to be done to preserve it. This new trend in children's literature is not that far from the hybrid cult of the 19th century (that was explored in chapter 6 of this dissertation), yet the authors' emphasis is now laid upon calling the audience to find a harmony or balance between civilization and nature, rather

[146] Interview collected on November 28th, 2012. Courtesy of Sophie Adde.

than on trying to fuse them together in savage children protagonists, the way their predecessors used to.

Appreciating and respecting the nature that surrounds us are a part of the simple pleasures of life François Delecour hopes to incite children readers into celebrating, with the picture book entitled *Linh et la fleur du Bonheur* (Linh and the flower of happiness), published in 2011. In the book, young Linh falls asleep after working the rice field and has a dream inspired by a legend her mother tells her every night at bedtime. In her dream, the little girl travels the land and meets fish, fruits and birds that all morph into a flower, which whispers, the way one would a precious secret: "écoute-moi Linh, je suis la fleur du bonheur, respire-moi et tu seras heureuse." (9/13/17)[147] And so she does, as hard as she can.

And as Linh continues her journey and finds herself transformed into a flower as well, she ponders: "c'est moi, la fleur du bonheur ?" and a dragonfly tells her: "ce n'est pas une fleur qui donne le bonheur aux êtres, c'est un

[147] "Listen to me, Linh, I am the flower of happiness, breathe me in and you will be happy."

bouquet. Et tu es une fleur de ce bouquet, comme le poisson, comme le litchi et comme l'oiseau." (23)[148]

At this point Linh awakens to the new knowledge that life itself – with all its things and beings – is a flower, and one should always take the time to breathe its awe in. Every single one of its petals should be cherished and celebrated. "L'envol d'une libellule m'a réveillée. La rizière était encore plus belle, plus lumineuse que d'habitude. Au loin, maman jouait avec mon frère et ma sœur. Pendant mon sommeil, quelqu'un avait déposé près de moi une fleur de lotus. J'ai respiré ma fleur. Le plus fort possible." (25)[149] Halfway between reality and oneirism, Linh's initiatory journey through the mountains of Vietnam is trying to communicate a vision of happiness being within easy reach to the readers. Delecour's story invites the audience to learn to see beauty in what surrounds them, in order to better face the struggles of everyday life, with some necessary perspective.

Delecour provides a metaphorical education to his readers, using the flower to give a body to what he hopes to convey. But what is learning through metaphor, for a child? It is a different means of teaching, one that is born out of adhesion and revelation. In this particular story the revelation is that of happiness, which, according to the author, requires to look at one's life and surroundings with an open and alert mind. In educating the child, Delecour hopes to educate the parents as well, for "the best teacher is, first and

[148] "I am the flower of happiness?" / "A flower does not give happiness to beings, a bouquet does. And you are a flower of this bouquet, just like the fish, the litchi and the bird."
[149] "The flight of a dragonfly woke me up. The rice field was even more beautiful, more luminous than it usually is. In the distance, mom was playing with my brother and sister. While I slept someone had placed a lotus flower next to me. I breathed my flower in. As hard as I could."

foremost, always a student, sharing what he/she has learned" or so he told me in an interview.[150]

Does this mean that one can simply universalize the idea that life is a flower that needs to be breathed in? I certainly do not believe so, and neither do the author or the illustrator of Linh's tale. Children's literature absolutely permits a certain metaphorical ease that leads to the receiving of uncontested commonplaces or truisms, yet it is my conviction that such fables teach their readers as much about learning and comprehending parables as they do about the theme itself. The primary objectives of such tropological universes are to help children develop a sense of not only themselves and their surroundings, but also of the symbolic dimension withheld in the objects of entertainment and schooling they are constantly presented with.

Aside from trying to implant healthy and positive values towards the world in its readers, children's literature also invariably aspire to be a guide for inner well-being and for working relationships with others. The forming of romantic connections, for example, is another of the crucial tasks children's literature chooses to carry for the growing child. A good narrative will show all the complexities that are incumbent upon love, the traps and deceptions as well as the pleasures, thus allowing children to follow a thread of learning the basics of what will play a major role in their teenage and adult lives.

In *L'amour, l'amour*, Olivier De Solminihac places his protagonists in a setting that will be familiar to the readers: elementary school. Knowing the mechanism of the structure, as well as the routine lived by grade-schoolers, can help the novel's audience relate to the character's emotional whirls. The predictability is used as a didactic tool for

[150] Interview collected on November 28th, 2012 at the 28th Salon du livre et de la presse jeunesse, in Montreuil, France. Courtesy of François Delecour.

readers to recognize the closeness born out of shared situations. In the novel, the main character, a little boy who is never named throughout the entire story, starts by saying that "au commencent c'était un jeu. C'était seulement un jeu," (7)[151] without specifying to what he is referring. He simply goes on narrating his days at the new school he just got enrolled in, the buying of supplies, playing soccer, marbles, trying to make some friends and avoiding the classic bulky bully. After quitting soccer because of said bully and losing all his marbles to another boy, the protagonist is left alone to sit the recess out.

Until the day young Marilyn sits next to him and he surprises himself by asking if she would like to play "au papa et à la maman" (house) with him. And the little girl to answer, very seriously, that she is not old enough to have kids yet but offers instead: "si tu veux on peut jouer à être simplement amoureux." (17)[152] As the little boy does not know how to act, his friend sets the rules of the game: "Marilyn m'explique ce que doivent faire les amoureux au début. Il faut que je lui offre des fleurs et que je l'invite à manger au restaurant." (18)[153]

Making his characters use pretend play at an age when they know very well what pretending means, allows De Solminihac to try to depict how the imitation game (of playing "adult") is a big part of what leads to learning to grow up. Indeed, growing up is not simply the matter of aging but also of understanding the new feelings and responsibilities that come with it. Children's literature strives to be as informative and instructive as possible to its young readers. Which is why, as the main character learns what falling in love feels like, through what appeared to be a simple and innocent game –

[151] "At the beginning, it was a game. It was just a game."
[152] "If you'd like, we can simply play being in love."
[153] "Marilyn explains to me what lovers must do at the beginning. I have to give her flowers and invite her to eat at a restaurant."

"c'est comme ça que font les amoureux. Quand il y en a un qui parle, l'autre rigole bêtement et cligne des yeux très vite," (24)[154] – he also bears witness to the problems his parents face as a couple. The very same day the protagonist is taught the way lovers behave he cannot help but notice, and the readers along with him, that when his parents talk to each other at dinner time, neither acts as they should: "durant tout ce temps-là, durant tout le temps où on racontait ce qui s'était passé aujourd'hui, personne n'a ri et personne n'a cligné les yeux." (26)[155]

So he asks his father whether him and his mother are still in love and, if they are, why they do not show it the way lovers are "supposed" to. And his father explains: "la vie change. Au début, quand j'ai connu maman, c'était des choses que l'on faisait. Ça, et beaucoup d'autres choses. Les amoureux au début font des choses qu'ils ne s'autorisent plus ensuite, parce qu'ils les trouveraient idiotes. C'est un peu chimique. Tout se transforme." (28)[156] In these last three words reside perhaps the one truth common to all the teachings of children's literature: everything changes. Adults change and so do children. Acknowledging it is an essential part of growing up. De Solminihac set his story in familiar surroundings (school and home) so that the child reader may find the basic assurances needed to feel secure enough to accept change.

Such stories give their audience "the sense that all actions will be contained and completed rather than left dissipated or unresolved in the much less tidy or protected world outside," argues literary critic Colin Manlove (186). This statement is true in the

[154] "That's what lovers do. When one talks, the other giggles like an idiot and bat his/her eyelashes really fast."
[155] "In that time, in that all time when we were telling what happened today, nobody laughed or blinked."
[156] "Life changes. In the beginning, when I met mom, we used to do these things. These, and a lot of others. Lovers, at the beginning, do things they no longer allow themselves to do later on, because they would find them stupid. It's a bit chemical. Everything transforms itself."

sense that school-enclosed narratives aim at reassuring the readers yet they also try to give a hint on how the outside world functions, where timetables and intentions are not as clear and set in stone. Just as children try to copy the behaviors that surround them, they also seek to make sense of it and to find their place within it. In the novel, the little boy feels the need to belong to a group, both with his friend Marilyn and inside his nuclear family.

Many books for children deal with the relationship between parent and child, siblings or friends. It is of course a matter of illustrating a world that children will relate to but also of teaching them the workings of a society in which they are bound to evolve more and more as they grow. School is, on a small scale, the theater of social connections, and home that of emotional ones. *L'amour, l'amour* combines both so that young protagonists and real children alike may reflect on the way attachments are formed, change with time, and sometimes simply dissolve.

Reading about quiet moments spent in the household – like the way De Solminihac's young protagonist rejoices in being tucked in by his father every night or talking with his mother while she makes dinner – appeases children, while the conflicts and tensions experienced by the parents over money and the ennui of habits in the couple may give the audience an opportunity to make sense of the many problems of contemporary society – that is, the potential destruction then reconstruction of the family unit through divorce, remarriage, having half-siblings or step-siblings, moving away, etc. Via the projection that their family offers, children discover themselves, and might often feel lost when the situation becomes complicated. It is a well-spread problem of society

nowadays and children's literature aims at being a safeguard for children in times of struggle.

Love, be it familial or romantic, gives children's literature a certain amount of alterity. It is sort of a backside to fear and is just as present. If confronting anxieties leads to freedom and the prelude of autonomy, love represents the importance of belonging and the joy to be found in interactions, which is as vital as fear is to the healthy social and psychological growth of the child. The readers are expected to feel reassured and secure, which is precisely what would allow them to indulge in the thrill of scary stories and to confront what might worry them in their own lives.

Through the various interactions the boy has with his parents and Marilyn, and the ones he notices between others, he can start shaping his sense of self. The story is undeniably naïve but De Solminihac does get his point across: "le jeu s'était beaucoup compliqué. Avec Marilyn, on ne jouait plus seulement pendant la récréation du matin, […] on jouait tout le temps. Et un jeu auquel on joue tout le temps, ce n'est plus un jeu. C'est la vraie vie." (44)[157] There is an element of truth to all pretend games and to all stories. Living life is also a form of play, or so the author seems to say. And in a way it is exactly why it should be taken seriously, according to the character, for, as you grow, a game might become even less of a game and may hold deeper implications.

Children's literature, when it comes to being instructive, aspires to be generative. It yearns to model the child in a similar fashion it does its characters. It weaves the tale of a childlike affect. The genre overflows with didacticism; the slightest experience lived by

[157] "The game had become a lot more complicated. With Marilyn, we were no longer playing during the morning's recess only, [...] we were playing all the time. And a game you play all the time, it's no longer a game. It's real life."

the protagonists almost invariably turning into a more or less subtle lesson on, not only what to do or feel, but also on how to feel and what the proper behavioral responses to adopt should be in the face of such emotions.

Many feelings are at play in children's literature, from fear to friendship, kinship and love. In trying to depict the spectrum of emotions in its entirety, – sometimes allegorically (with phantasmagorical figures like that of the vampire) or quite naively (like the burgeoning relationship between Marilyn and De Solminihac's narrator) – fiction for the young tries to help shape the lives of its readers. Mixing the imaginary that writers of the genre openly associate with children with the reality of an adult-governed society, children's literature believes itself to be both "entertain[ing] and edif[ying]." (Tatar xiii)

Now, does it actually reach its goals? Critics, at least, seem to think so. Zena Sutherland, prominent American reviewer of children's books, believes that what motivates children to read is similar to what adults hope to find when they open a work of fiction. They all read "to dream, to learn, to laugh, and to enjoy the familiar and explore the unknown. They read for sheer pleasure and they absorb, in their reading, those facets of books that reflect the developmental values appropriate to their particular stage of growth." (22)

The characters of children's books journey towards finding the ability to navigate their reality; a reality that can be as harsh as it is wondrous. In figuring out that pain and pleasure, good and bad, etc., are not mutually exclusive but, on the contrary, cohabitate in and out of them, the protagonists develop their awareness of their surroundings as well as their sense of self. The readers, as the story unfolds, might just be able to get a better

grasp of themselves and of the issues of a society in which they were aground, relating to the narratives of school and family days. “Fantasy becomes functional for children attempting to construct a world that is manageable: small enough for them to acquire a sense of mastery and empowerment and thus mitigate or at least contain their fears and anxieties, yet large enough to facilitate wonder and help them imagine possibilities for things to be other than how they find them,” endorses David Rudd (77).

Children’s literature tries to be a source of both comfort and maturing. By placing its characters in adventuresome situations, it aims at arousing the young readers’ curious nature, in order to increase the pleasure they get out of learning. The genre that is fiction for children aspires to be a facilitator of the process of growing up as well as an observer of childhood. Nonetheless, it shows, in doing so, that the emotions of the young – be they of a pleasurable or disquieting kind – are not so dissimilar from that of adults. American novelist Lloyd Alexander was utterly convinced that there is no significant difference between what children’s books and adult books tell their readers. In an interview given for Penguin editions in 1994, he explained the reasons behind the shift he operated from adult to children’s fiction thus:

> For some reason, after about twelve years of writing for grown-ups, […] it seemed to me that whatever it was I wanted to say […] the best way I could say it was through the form of the so-called child's book; [which for me] is as serious an art form as anything else. […] Unlike a lot of authors, I was not writing for any specific child, […] I was writing for myself, as a very expressive and profound art form. […] I found myself able to deal with things that I could never even express writing for adults.

> […] This may seem quite surprising [as, when] you think of a book for young people, [you think] now you can't deal with serious things, far from it. […] There is, I'm convinced, no inner, qualitative difference between writing for adults and writing for children. The raw materials are the same for both: the human condition and our response to it.[158]

The emotions displayed and instilled in children's literature are not the exclusivity of youth but remain true in adulthood, if a tad more nuanced. Love and fear continue to exist past childhood, so does the need to belong. After all, as De Solminihac would say, in growing up everything changes, yet also remains the same would add Fierpied. The tale of children's literature is truly that of the human condition; a condition in which readers cyclically assume the roles of both teacher and pupil (with real children being the inspiration for fictional characters who, in turn, help them grow in their sense of self and of the world around them) and live games and passions as intensely as adult readers would, if not more so.

[158] *A Visit with Lloyd Alexander.* Dir. Savatteri, David. New York: Dutton Children's Books & Puffin Books, divisions of Penguin USA. 1994. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtECLFD4n0Q>. Web.

Chapter 8:

Growing up "will be an awfully big adventure:" learning to be[159]

Learning to learn and to feel is not the only lesson that children's literature strives to imprint upon its readers. One may wonder what could still be left to learn, once everything that childhood is expected to be is integrated by the reader? Oxymoronically, what needs to be taught and learned is actually how to unlearn and think for oneself. After children fulfill their need for mimesis, they will have to distinguish themselves from what they previously sought to imitate, so that they may grow into themselves, as proper persons. And in that also, children's literature wishes to be formative. Children's literature tries to teach its readers to rebel and divest themselves of the very image of the child it created. It tries to prepare them to be, *simply*.

Now how can literature teach its readers to unlearn and just be? It obviously can only manage to plant the seed of such an idea through metaphor. In a similar fashion to the way the character of the vampire stood as an avatar for fears of loss, the odyssey towards independence and freedom is often symbolically driven by the figure of the pirate. Indeed, who best than a pirate could stage the departure towards adulthood, via a metaphorical journey through the adventures of life? The pirate child illustrates the process of leaving the nest, letting go of one's childhood in order to discover the "awfully big adventure" that growing up, and being an adult, will be.

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[159] Barrie, James M. *Peter Pan*. London: Puffin Classics, 1994 (1911). Print.132

Adventures await at the corner of the page for the reader and even, or so they make it seem, at the fingertips of authors of fiction for the young. In an interview discussing the reasons behind his decision to write for children, German writer Michaël Ende explained:

> I admit it without shame: the real, true motivation that pushes me to write is the pleasure of the free and open play of imagination. For me, working on a book is, every single time, like taking off towards a journey which destination I know not; it's an adventure that makes me face difficulties I had no clue about beforehand and that gives birth within me to experiences and ideas I was completely unsuspecting of, an adventure at the end of which I myself have become another man, different from the one I was at the beginning. (Montandon 197)

Childhood and youth tend to be depicted as a journey full of adventures in children's literature. In a similar fashion to the way Ende depicted the changes that go through him when he writes a new story, the characters travel their narratives through unknown obstacles and surprise encounters to emerge grown, both physically and emotionally. In staging such wanderings for their characters, and expressing an analogous course within themselves, authors of children's literature hope to send their readers on the path to growth, self-discovery and affirmation.

"To die will be an awfully big adventure," says Peter Pan. (132) Play, adventure and exploration are all parts of the commonplaces willingly attributed to childhood and there is an enormous amount of picture books and novels for the young that take

advantage of it. Tales of children skipping school to go on thrilling adventures and treasure hunts abound, like in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, where the narrator warns us that "the elastic heart of youth cannot be compressed into one constrained shape long at a time," as Tom ponders what would happen "if he went away – ever so far away, into unknown countries beyond the seas – and never came back any more!" (82) and wavers between future careers as clown, soldier and buffalo hunting Indian, before setting his mind on the life of a pirate.

Amongst the emblems of this thirst of the child for adventures lived and dreamed, the pirate, with his plastic hook and black eye-patch, serves as a figurehead. It is one of the many figures of adventure that children's literature contains, sharing the spotlight with stories of detective investigations, such as Enyd Blyton's series *The Famous Five,* geographical explorations, like Jules Verne's *Les Enfants du Capitaine Grant*, prehistoric thrills, as with Paul Thiès's *Petit Féroce* series, time-travel, etc., yet it presents the advantage, for this study, of having been placed center stage in the last 15 years with Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise or the Peter Pan spin-off *Jack and the Neverland Pirates*, notably. And, most importantly, my choice to focus on the figure of the pirate was due to the fact that it has a great potential for mimesis and offers a variety and easiness of real-life play adaptations to children readers. After all, even the intrepid Tom Sawyer thinks it a prime career choice:

> He would be a pirate! That was it! now his future lay plain before him, and glowing with unimaginable splendor. How his name would fill the world, and make people shudder! How gloriously he would go plowing the dancing seas, in his long, low, black-hulled racer, the Spirit of

> the Storm, with his grisly flag flying at the fore! And at the zenith of his fame, how he would suddenly appear at the old village and stalk into church, brown and weather-beaten, in his black velvet doublet and trunks, his great jack-boots, his crimson sash, his belt bristling with horse-pistols, his crime-rusted cutlass at his side, his slouch hat with waving plumes, his black flag unfurled, with the skull and crossbones on it, and hear with swelling ecstasy the whisperings, "It's Tom Sawyer the Pirate! – the Black Avenger of the Spanish Main!" (83)

The pirate figure holds a dream-like quality: exploration, gold, freedom, stylish costumes, growling voice and hook or wooden-leg props; it almost seems to be begging for reenactments.

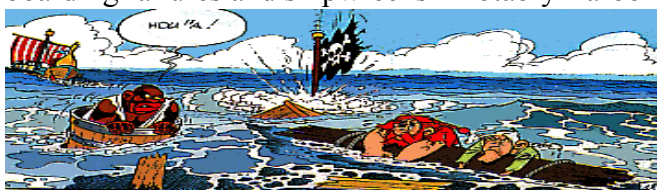
At a time when medias for the young are saturated with pirates each more glamorous than the next, it is interesting to reflect upon their journey: what happened to the pirate figure of children's literature from its appearance towards the end of the 19th century until today? And how is its metaphor for the child leaving childhood behind at work?

From the ancient Greek "peira," meaning to try, to dare, and to set about doing something, th

word 'pirate' represents in the imaginary of the reader – young or confirmed, – liberty, perils, conquests, and treasure chests overflowing with more gold than one could ever use.

Today, the fierce and ill-smelling pirates of classic tales share the scene with the pacifist and baking pirates of Paul Thiès's *Plume* series and Disney's sexy pirates sailing the Caribbean seas, to only name a few.[160] Pirates play a prominent role in children's literature, and it has been the case since the very first publication of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* in 1883. Stevenson was the very first writer to contemplate the pirate in children's literature as a being full as aspirations, roaming the seas searching for treasures, and no longer as a mere barbaric looter, thus offering a vast spectrum of possible to the imaginary of the children's literature that was to follow. At the core of what we may call the children universe, that is literature, cinema, video games, etc., the figure of the pirate is displayed in an incalculable number of variants and his quest for adventure seems to appeal to all age groups.

"As soon as pirates started making themselves scarce in the Caribbean, circa mid-18th century, they invaded fiction. The captain in particular, emblematic figure of piracy, prince of the seas, terrifying and charismatic, one-legged or one-armed, swarthy and tattooed, patch on the eye and gold loop earrings, soon becomes an inescapable character of stories for boys," writes French scholar Monique Chassagnol in *Peter Pan, figure mythique*. (61) Some claim to be the Robin Hoods of the seas, pillaging rich vessels to give to the less fortunate, while others are depicted like living farces, accumulating boarding failures and shipwrecks – notably Barbe-Rouge (Red-Beard) and his crew in



Goscinny's and Uderzo's *Astérix le*

[160] Sources for images on previous page, respectively: Barrie, James M. *Peter and Wendy*. Illustrations: Francis Donkin. Salt Lake City: Project Gutenberg, 2006 (1915). Web. / Thiès, Paul. *Plume le pirate (3), Le Secret des sept crânes.* Paris: Flammarion, 2006. Print. Cover page. / Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*'s inspired map. <www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/treasure/> Web. / *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*. Dir. Verbinski, Gore. Walt Disney Studios, 2003. DVD.

Gaulois,[161] – or, in a more classic way, as rascals thirsty for blood, using brute force to quench all their desires, be it monetary or physical.

Commonly subjected to a dictator although holding his freedom and independence above all else, the pirate fundamentally is a true knot of contradictions. If one takes into consideration the historical origins of the mythical figure that is the pirate, it is logical to ponder how an individual whose nature was inherently violent evolved into being used to help children readers on their journey of growth?

One of the most emblematic examples of the pirate of fiction for the young is, as anticipated, J.M. Barrie's Captain Hook. He certainly embodies the ultimate pirate: cruel, somewhat ridiculous, and above all, adult (in opposition to the eternal youth of Peter Pan). Nonetheless, lingering a little bit over the personalities of these two protagonists, it is impossible not to notice the extent to which they are actually alike, or the especially strong status of interdependency that defines them.

Firstly, Hook is the very incarnation of the typical pirate captain. He possesses a great ship, the *Jolly Roger*, and leads an army of men each more sinister than the next, as all self-respecting captains should. He is described as an elegant yet cold individual, a murderous sociopath who knows no fear (outside of the crocodile and its tick-tacking, which serve to tone down the otherwise dour character). "Jas. Hook," writes the narrator,

> was the only man that the Sea-Cook feared. […] Instead of a right hand he had the iron hook. […] As dogs this terrible man treated and addressed [his men], and as dogs they obeyed him. In person he was cadaverous and blackavised, and his hair was dressed in long curls, which

[161] Image source: http://www.mage.fst.uha.fr/asterix/caricat/barberg.html

> at a little distance looked like black candles, and gave a singularly threatening expression to his handsome countenance. (76)

A description that sends chills up anyone's spine and to which Peter Pan hastens to add that red glows shine in his eyes when he sinks his hook within you – which is the very reason why he can only belong to Peter himself.

Where Barrie's character strays from the classic pirate figure of children's literature is that not even once in the novel he is looking for a treasure. Indeed, he is far too obsessed with the idea of killing Peter and everything the boy stands for, to waste his time with adventures and ship boarding. Inside the story, Hook stands for everything adult and evil, although the fact that he is evil might actually precisely be due to him being an adult, a fact that naturally makes Peter his nemesis. In short, killing Peter would amount to killing childhood and the infinity of dreams. Indeed, Peter Pan is the incarnation of the *puer aeternus*, he is seductive, brave but also frivolous and cruel at times, as equally ready to take over Hook's place as he is to vanquish him.

Several times in the novel, the narrator subtly lets the readers understand that the pirate captain and the chief of the lost boys are interchangeable. When Peter imitates the pirate's voice in order to free Tiger Lily, the captain's crew cannot make the difference and untie the young Indian girl without asking questions. Hook himself is thrown off balance by it. And as they fight, the text unveils a mirror effect between the two characters who are crossing swords using the exact same gestures and flaunting the same smile of jubilation, as if each was merely fighting his reflection, or shadow.

> Strangely, it was not in the water that they met. Hook rose to the rock to breathe, and at the same moment Peter scaled it on the opposite

> side. The rock was slippery as a ball, and they had to crawl rather than climb. Neither knew that the other was coming. Each feeling for a grip met the other's arm: in surprise they raised their heads; their faces were almost touching; so they met. (127)

The very visual effect the narrator creates in the reader's mind is intentional, mirroring each of the protagonist's actions by a similar one on his nemesis, to the point where it might actually be difficult to distinguish one from the other. The resemblance they display in their body language serves to stress a deeper sameness, that of intentions and desires, as well as a common goal of overpowering the other, along with a budding fear that, were they to succeed, their main source of entertainment and purpose would vanish simultaneously.

Monique Chassagnol additionally argues that,

> both rebels, looking for a mother, supplicating the same little girl to adopt them, Peter Pan and Jack Hook reject social order and choose exile and solitude. In severing all ties, in running away, one through the air and the other one by sea, they definitively placed themselves as outlaws, recognizing no other rule than the one they impose. One gives up the cozy comfort of his nursery with attentive parents, the other the comfort of the high social spheres to which he belongs. Monopolizing power and reigning through terror, they immediately present themselves as captains, with a right to life and death over the ones they govern. (71-2)

Hook and Pan indeed share a similar disinterest when it comes to the lives of their crews. To illustrate the mercilessness with which the pirate captain rules and gets obeyed,

the narrator stages a walk for the pirates. As they are marching on their hunt of lost boys and Indians, Hook urges his followers to walk faster, which leads to one of them incidentally brushing the captain and creasing Hook's collar. Highly displeased by the episode, Hook kills him, only to continue walking in cold blood, as if nothing out of the ordinary happened: "the hook shoots forth, there is a tearing sound and one screech, then the body is kicked aside, and the pirates pass on. He has not even taken the cigars from his mouth." (77) And his young nemesis shares the same cold-hearted detachment towards his own crew of lost boys. As the narrator – trying to count the current number of boys present on the island at the time when the story takes place – explains, Peter would take care of eliminating the problem if any of his followers started to show signs of growth – as if it were but the natural ridding of weed in a garden. "The boys on the island vary, of course, in numbers, according as they get killed and so on; and when they seem to be growing up, which is against the rules, Peter thins them out." (72) It is written in passing, with a tone so casual that it actually heightens the savagery of the act. The neutrality of the sentence is striking as it hints at children's cruelty and the fact that they do not have a sense of death but nevertheless tend to talk about it often and casually. They do not understand it as being definitive or irreversible because, in their way of thinking, reality itself is reversible and transformable. The young boy and the captain also share the distinctiveness of their attire, which they fiercely protect, vindictively forbidding any of their crew members to dress or look even remotely close to the way they do. This is a subtle way of illustrating the strong possessiveness and selfishness of the child, while questioning how different or "other" a being the adult really is.

If Pan and Hook share cruelty, selfishness, pride and a craving for adventures, the fact remains that Peter is just a child, who feels astonished and chagrined by the lack of justice the captain demonstrates each time they engage in a fight. Thus, as he lends a hand to a disarmed Hook so that they may resume their combat fairly, the pirate sinks his teeth deep in the child's arm, and the narrator says: "Not the pain of this but its unfairness was what dazed Peter. It made him quite helpless. He could only stare, horrified. Every child is affected thus the first time he is treated unfairly." (128) The sense of justice and injustice runs deep in children, though it mostly tends to be self-directed, and the ethical dimension of children's literature is particularly important. It falls within the framework of a strong dualistic and axiological tradition of the genre of fiction for the young. To children things tend to be right or wrong, fair or unfair, and there is no in-between for Peter Pan or his readers. That first experience of unfairness is quite particular in Peter's case, for he is the one and only to remain a child and thus to encounter first time feelings every single time the same thing happens to him. Killing Peter would mean ensuring the triumph of the very flaws he shares with the pirate captain, as the innocence that makes him so compelling to children and their mothers in the novel would be lost.

Yet, fundamentally, Hook, who has lost this ability to forget and ceaselessly come anew that characterizes Peter, intuitively understands that his very existence depends on that of the young boy. Beyond the frontiers of Neverland and childhood the pirate is of no importance, he is non-existent. Which is why, as Hook feels the hour of his defeat and, by extension, of his death ring, it is Peter whom he begs to push him into the void – and the open jaws of the crocodile, which stands here as an anthropomorphic incarnation of the

implacable Atropos waiting to cut the thread of the pirate's life with her sharp shears, from the Ancient Greek myth of the Moirai.

Nonetheless, where the pirate figure of the story takes a whole new dimension is in the aftermath of Hook's death. Indeed, the very next day, Peter orders Wendy to fashion him a pirate costume out of the deceased captain's rags as he makes the decision – following a very personal logic that he finds merely natural – to take on the role of his old enemy, both as a sign of respect for Hook and to maintain the balance of Neverland. He then proceeds to make the lost boys – now christened pirates – slave away like dogs on the deck of his newly acquired *Jolly Roger*. "Peter […] said he hoped that they would do their duty like gallant hearties, but that he knew they were the scum of Rio and the Gold Coast, and if they snapped at him he would tear them. […] Instant obedience was the only safe thing." (212-13)[162]

And as Peter dons his costume and becomes a pirate, he also becomes an adult. The act of reading is here designed to mime the movement of becoming an adult, which was typical of earlier educational novels, in particular the German *bildungsromane* of the 17th and 18th centuries. Once you start dressing like a man, and having the work responsibilities of one, you are a man. And in that way Peter the pirate is Peter the grown-up. Because he killed Hook, Peter feels obligated to adopt, more than play, his

[162] Image of the *Jolly Roger*: Barrie, James M. *Peter and Wendy*. Illustrations: Francis Donkin. Salt Lake City: Project Gutenberg, 2006 (1915). Web.

part and to keep them both alive within him. “It was afterwards whispered among them that on the first night [Peter] wore this suit he sat long in the cabin with Hook’s cigar-holder in his mouth and one hand clenched, all but the forefinger, which he bent and held threateningly aloft like a hook.” (213) Deep inside, the no-longer a child knows, just like his nemesis did, that one cannot exist without the other, in the same way that each and every child is fated to grow up. Some impossibilities cannot be countered. Barrie saw childhood – and youth – as a perishable thing. The tickling clock in the stomach of the crocodile pursuing the pirate captain is the perfect embodiment of the fear of getting older, having to answer for oneself and others, and eventually dying. The narrator actually even stops the clock right before the pirate’s demise, symbolically emphasizing the end of a life. The clock also stands as a warning sign of what is to happen towards the denouement of the novel. As the adult is swallowed by the ticking of time, the child must grow and take his place. Time stops for no one and children will invariably have to outgrow their childhood, Barrie seems to have morosely illustrated.

“In order for an adult to be born, a child must die,” writes Annie Rolland. (184) And in Hook’s death, one can actually see the death of the figure of eternal youth and innocence that Peter Pan used to stand for. The immortality of both characters can only reside in their simultaneous existence. They are but one and the same, hero and villain, as well as child and adult, being merely two sides of the same coin, needing the other to survive. Along with this melancholic assessment that all will grow and die, Barrie also draws a simplistic, yet efficient, picture of the society within which his readers – then and now – will evolve as they grow, where good and evil coexist inside of everything and everyone.

If the figure of the pirate in children's literature aims at depicting the decay of the child, what then is the purpose of the many nice pirates that roam the seas of contemporary fiction for the young? Actually, if one observes the daily lives of real pirates, beyond the occasional burst of savagery, they are essentially men-children, spending their lives at play, often in disguise, and living according to their own rules. As such they are all the more relatable for the young readers who devour their adventurous tales. Which is why the 20th century has seen the birth of pirates as gentle as lambs, and whose origins can sometimes be quite eccentric. For example, the cashiers at the supermarket in *Raoul Taffin pirate* become bewitching siren-whales as the young Raoul discovers his vocation in between two aisles of vegetables, pushing his galleon cart, under Gérard Moncomble's pen, while Luffy, the main character and captain of the Straw Hat Pirates crew in *One Piece*, Eiichirô Oda's popular manga series, is a young peasant who happens not to know how to swim.

As for Plume Fourchette's (Feather Fork) pirate family, in Paul Thiès's story, they originally were pastry chefs from one generation to the next and each of the four children is adorned with the name of a dessert.[163] The narrator actually makes the distinction on the very first page of the first book that on the seas roam both good pirates and bad pirates: "Les méchants pirates massacrent les gens, et les gentils pirates cherchent des trésors. Le papa de Plume, lui, est très gentil. La preuve c'est qu'avant il était pâtissier. Seulement il aimait voyager, alors il a vendu sa pâtisserie, et a acheté un bateau à la

[163] Plume (Feather) is the nickname his family has bestowed upon the boy because of his very thin constitution. The young hero's name is actually Parfait. His big sister's name is Madeleine, them comes Honoré (after the St. Honoré cake), his big brother, and Charlotte, his little sister. Even the parrot, Tarte aux Pommes (Apple Pie) has been named after a dessert.

place. Il l'a appelé le *Bon Appétit* et depuis, tout le monde est pirate chez les Fourchette ! C'est un beau métier !" (1: 6-7)[164]

It is quite undeniable that narratives of friendly pirates are principally intended for an audience of young boys, who will easily identify with young heroes excused from washing up or from going to school, and who are in a position to unearth as many treasures as their short limbs can carry. Indeed, as Plume tells the readers, their life routine is rather pleasant and eventful: "D'habitude, les pirates trouvent des pièces d'or le lundi, des perles le mardi, des diamants le mercredi, et ça continue jusqu'au dimanche ! Le dimanche, les pirates se reposent. Ils mangent du requin rôti, ils se baignent et ils bronzent au soleil. C'est la belle vie !" (11: 5-6)[165] Nonetheless, these kind of stories are first and foremost about making the child reader dream of adventures and travels. The fictional figure of the pirate aims at nourishing the young readers' imagination, without strong distinctions on grounds such as gender.

The gentle pirate stands for the overcoming of fears and the letting go towards an independence whose 'call' gets louder, and pull stronger, as the child grows. "The world of adventure, it is what matters and what is not – that is to say, it is a universe of fiction

[164] "Mean pirates slaughter people, and good pirates look for treasures. Plume's daddy is very nice, for one. He used to be a pastry chef, that's a proof. But he liked to travel, so he sold his pastry shop, and bought a ship instead. He called it the *Bon Appétit* and, since then, everybody is a pirate on the Fork family! It's a beautiful profession!"

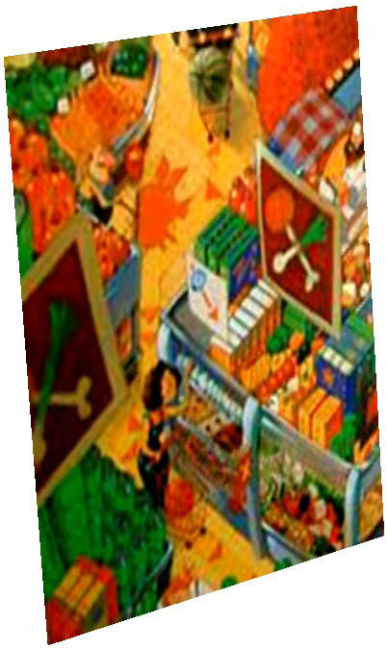
[165] "Usually, pirates find gold coins on Monday, pearls on Tuesday, diamonds on Wednesday, and it goes on all the way to Sunday! On Sunday, pirates rest. They eat roasted shark, they bathe and tan in the sun. It's quite the beautiful life!"

whose cohesion and coherence are insured by their fantastical character. The world of adventure is a world of possibles, and the crossing of the frontier corresponds to the experiencing of these possibles, terrifying, alluring, fascinating," concurs French professor Matthieu Letourneux in *Littérature de jeunesse, incertaines frontières*. (35)

The issue here is not to be afraid of the unknown, and to actually even desire it, as daring in itself is a good thing that can lead to wonderful discoveries and beautiful encounters. The friendly pirate of children's literature drives its readers to courage, exploration, the quest for freedom and emancipation, without actually feeling entirely alone since the crew offers the child a substitute to the diminished or absent familial context. These narratives may help the young realize that one can as much be a prisoner of one's fears as a victim of unfair superiors, and that both cases require resistance and their taking things in hand so that true freedom can be enjoyed, the freedom of being, quite *simply*. There is a lot to gain from taking that first step or trying out new experiences, seem to say the good pirates of children's literature: material as well as inner wealth, friends, lovers, secrets hideouts and cherished memories, but also bravery, pride and happiness.

Fiction for the young thus tries to bequeath important values as well as an appreciation for the simple pleasures of life to its readers. It is essential not to let fears, weaknesses or handicaps decide the course of one's life. Luffy, the cheeky teenager of *One Piece*, thus decides against all odds to become a pirate –

captain, no less – even if he does not know how to swim and will never be able to, since as a child he accidently ingested a magical fruit that prevents it. No matter how many times his entourage might tell him that he does not have what it takes to be a pirate, the teenager never gives up. Luffy stands for his dreams, showing tenacity and a healthy faith in himself. Having the strength to get back on one's feet and to overcome life's obstacles in order to fulfill one's dreams, whatever it takes, is a fundamental teaching of the fictitious figure of the good pirate.



As for Raoul Taffin's first steps into piracy, they teach the readers that adventures can be lived two steps away just as well as thousands of miles afar, so long as one knows to look around. Therefore, when young Raoul and his parents are buying groceries at the local supermarket, the promotional posters on fresh vegetables start floating like the Jolly Roger, the offers and microphone calls of the female cashiers become mermaids' songs ready to lead the demise, and the carts are all the more vessels to board for loot. Moncomble's little grocery pirate tells the readers that it is both healthy and pleasurable to let themselves dream.

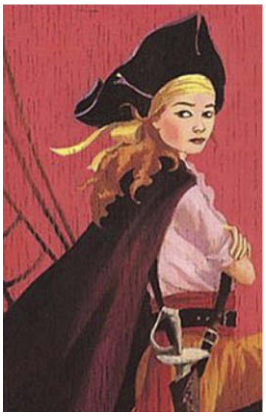
As was explained earlier in this chapter, narratives about pirates tend to openly address young boy readers of about 7 to 10 years old. Yet, literary piracy does not require a complete renunciation of femininity for it is also written in the feminine, at least in its margins. If the feminine presence is minimal in tales of the good pirate kind, the

character of the young female pirate has nonetheless made itself quite prominent in young adult historical fictions of the 21st centuries. First, the comic aspect that reigned upon books aimed at a younger audience has entirely disappeared in these stories of female buccaneers, – as is the case with the majority of works for teenage readers, and was seen previously in this dissertation. In its place, the emotional range that authors and editors of the genre deem stronger and thus more appropriate to teenage life (love, desire, uncertainties, incomprehension, anger, etc.) come to take over this flagrant absence of humor. These teenage feminine adventure novels convey more ambivalent messages than the two categories previously mentioned and are, in a way, the product of a combination of both the values and clichés formulated in said categories. Indeed, the historical element of narratives such as Alain Surget's *Mary Tempête* or Anne-Marie Desplat-Duc's *Un Corsaire nommé Henriette*[166] implies that the young heroines will evolve in a context much closer to that of the macabre pirates of Captain Hook than of the debonair Captain Fourchette. Nevertheless, their humanity and benevolence seem to remain intact. They are the good pirates in a world of bloody brutes, which to them still continues to be a synonym of freedom.

Female pirates first appeared on the stage of literature for the young about ten years ago. The historical-romantic narratives often recount the story of young maidens compelled to dress as a man in order to survive and to free themselves from the demands of an 18th century whose mores are too strict. If these novels' main goal is to attract a new readership towards a genre that had been qualified as masculine until then, the message they broadcast nonetheless remains problematic. Admittedly, piracy not only equals a life of travels and adventures, giving its members the chance to acquire a physical and

[166] *A Privateer Named Henriette*.

monetary independence, but it is also, and above all, the synonym of a rejection of middle class values such as marriage or children. Still, freedom and power within a patriarchal society inevitably require that the young girls wear the disguise of a man.



It is a sacrifice that the 16 year-old heroine[167] of *Un Corsaire nommé Henriette* understands wholly as she reflects, prior to donning her father's frayed costume in order to escape the convent to which she was sent: "Je ne suis pas encore folle, mais si je continue à demeurer enfermée, je vais le devenir. Et le seul moyen que j'aie de sortir, c'est de changer d'aspect." (85)[168] Even within the equality ideal sported by piracy, women cannot be entirely self-sufficient. The codes that prevail for the *he-pirate* do not apply to the *she-pirate*, forced to find in what serves the expression of the masculine the means to cloak the feminine, suddenly reducing the dreamed liberty to a need for survival through self-concealment.

The same is true of Alain Surget's protagonist in *Mary Tempête*. The story is loosely based on the historical persona of Mary Read, an English pirate of the early 18th century, the Golden Age of Piracy. The real Mary Read had been forced to dress a boy from a very young age by her widowed mother so that they may receive financial support from her paternal grandmother, and kept doing so after her mother's death in

[167] Despite having main characters of sixteen years old, both Desplat-Duc's and Surget's stories target young girls of about 11 to 14. They aim at giving a "forward" model to their audience. Images are from the covers of both novels, which are not illustrated.

[168] "I am not yet crazy, but if I have to remain locked in, I will be. And the only way I have to get out is to change my appearance."

order to be able to find work on a ship as a teenager and later join the British naval military, using the name of her late brother Willy. She was later on forced to join the pirates who had boarded the army ship, still under the cover of boy clothing. Read grew quite fond of piracy and kept her true identity a secret to all but Captain John Rackham ("Calico Jack") and his companion Anne Bonny (also a disguised *she-pirate*), whom she joined a year before her imprisonment and passing in 1721.

Surget's novel follows the same time lines but adds a very strong note of longing for freedom and admiration for the pirate life from an early age: "On pare les pirates d'une audace peu commune. L'abordage devient un combat titanesque. Le forban un être mythique aux coffres remplis d'or enfouis dans une île mystérieuse, là-bas, au bout de l'océan. Dans une île sauvage gardée par des Indiens géants, coiffés de plumes pareilles à des rayons de soleil. [...] L'image du pirate s'auréole de légende." (40)[169] Here young Mary paints a picture worthy of the legendary and utopian Libertalia.

Libertalia, also known as Libertatia, was the name given to a – more likely than not – fictional libertarian and anarchist colony established by pirates in the late 17th century on the island of Madagascar. Daniel Defoe wrote of it in his half fact-half fiction work *A General History of Pyrates* (1724), under the pseudonym and fake identity of Captain Charles Johnson. According to Defoe, Libertalia lasted for 25 years and was an ideal republic that would have been the envy of even the legendary Atlantis. The utopian society is rumored to have been the first colony to banish social classes, slavery, misogyny, racism and homophobia, in favor of a perfect equality, according to American

[169] "We adorn pirates with an uncommon audacity. The boarding becomes a titanic battle. The marauder a mythical being with chests full of gold buried on a mysterious island, over there, at the ends of the ocean. On a savage island guarded by giant Indians, coiffed with feathers like sunbeams. [...] The image of the pirate is haloed with legend."

historian Marcus Rediker (124-39). However, does that mean that this dream of parity is the fate that awaits both Henriette and Mary as they turn to piracy?

"Ni Dieu ni Roi ! [...] L'argent est réparti équitablement entre les pirates,"[170] (185/198) Captain Rackham tells young Mary. This sentence may actually summarize the strongest point of appeal of the pirate figure in literature destined to the young. Neither God, nor King by extension also means no parents and no teachers, a life free of all sources of authority. The pirate life gives children readers visions of a world where they could have a say in decisions made, where they would matter as much as the next person and would be able to steer their lives in whichever directions they set their minds on. The pirate figure whispers intents of rebellion and mutiny, which makes it all the more seductive to the genre of children's literature. It bears a halo of legend, projecting a very strong sense of justice again, *à la* Robin Hood. It is therefore highly understandable and relatable when Surget's Mary succumbs to Rackham's promise of equity and joins his crew of seamen. Mary undeniably enjoys the beautiful life of equality and freedom that piracy aboard the *Kingston* grants her, yet the respect she had developed towards her captain withers the day he learns that Willy is actually a woman and answers to the name of Mary. Following the discovery, Rackham demands that she pays her respect to him the way all women should. Mary barely escapes the affront with the help of her friend Anne Bonny, the only other woman on board (also dressed as a man), who already is the captain's mistress. The feminine liberation through piracy, although a genuine progress for the era these stories take place in, thus remains partially illusory, as it can only happen under the cloak of dissimulation, and quite often, that of a masculine protectorate, who

[170] "Neither God nor King! [...] Money is fairly distributed among pirates."

finds payment in the flesh. What, then, could such protagonists offer to their growing readers, in modern times?

The most interesting thing might reside in a comparative analysis of both heroines opposite their male comrades. The young girls, be it Mary or Henriette, do not exactly blend in their environment. From the exhaustive reading of the genre I have performed, I can honestly write that the female pirates are more often depicted as heroic adventurers than as criminals, unlike their masculine counterparts. Mary and Henriette are described as young persons of a slender and frail built, elegant, agile and gifted in the art of the sword, whereas their companions "forment une ligne menaçante de gueules barrées de cicatrices, de têtes hirsutes au regard sauvage... [qui] n'ont pour tout vêtement qu'une casaque de toile et un caleçon taché de sang qui leur arrive à mi-cuisse."[171] (Surget 179) Both girls even come to express doubts regarding their choosing a life in such setting. When her captain decides to abandon slaves to a certain death on an old tub of a ship they just plundered, one of Mary's fellow crewmen explains to her: "Nous sommes des loups de mer, Willy. On guette, on chasse, on traque. L'air qu'on respire sent souvent la poudre, mais à la différence de la guerre, c'est pour not' profit qu'on se bat. Ça s'appelle la liberté !"[172] (231) Which marks the exact moment when, for Mary, "la liberté ven[ait] de prendre une odeur de moisi,"[173] says the narrator. (231)

On a side note, the crewman's tirade is very representative of how such stories for children lead to play practices and mimetic activities. Books for children do not stand

[171] Their companions "form a threatening line of mugs ribbed with scars, of coarse heads with savage eyes... [who] have no other articles of clothing than a hessian tabard and trunks stained with blood that fall mid-thigh."
[172] "We're sea dogs, Willy. We wait, we hunt, we track down. The air we breathe smells of gunpowder, but unlike with war, it's for our own profit we fight. That's called freedom!"
[173] "Freedom just started having a rotten smell."

alone, in the sense that their existence is not limited to the page but take another dimension through play, especially in the case of pirate narratives that easily call for sliding into reality. It is indeed fairly easy to picture young children reenacting the old pirate's words, recruiting their comrades in play with a similar spirit and drive for adventure, bandana on the eye, wood stick in hand, and "Arrr!" rolling off the tongue.

Getting back to the impression that "real" piracy left on our two heroines, Desplat-Duc's Henriette goes even further in the expression of her shock and disbelief. Her thoughts are directly transcribed in the first person singular and only bring dread and nausea to the reader's mind:

> Le spectacle qui s'offr[ait] à moi me glaça. Des corps par centaines gisaient, qui sans bras, qui sans tête, qui sans jambe, dans des mares de sang. [...] À présent, nous étions tous, sabres, épées, poignards sanglants à la main, assez décontenancés. Je regardais autour de moi tous ces cadavres et réprimais un haut-le-cœur. Je n'avais pas imaginé pareille tuerie. Étais-je vraiment faite pour cette vie-là? Je n'en étais plus si sure. Aurais-je le courage de poursuivre l'aventure, si la richesse et l'honneur étaient à ce prix ? (189/192)[174]

The image of piracy drawn by both Desplat-Duc and Surget is verging on the morbid and monstrous. Why have their characters evolve in such environments, one may ask? What lesson could a young reader draw from a universe of savagery and deceit? The truth is that Desplat-Duc's and Surget's pirates are, unlike Hook or the Fourchettes,

[174] "The display that I was offered froze me. Hundreds of corpses were lying, some without arms, others without a head or legs, in pools of blood. [...] Now, we were all, sabers, swords, daggers in hand, rather disconcerted. I looked around me at all the dead bodies and repressed the urge to retch. I had never imagined such slaughtering. Was I truly made for this kind of life? I was not so sure anymore. Would I have the fortitude necessary to pursue the adventure, if wealth and honor had such a price?"

neither bad nor good, but an intricate and more authentic combination of what makes a human being, that is qualities, flaws, dreams, secrets, doubts, etc. Placing the two young heroines in a harsh setting is the authors' way of giving their readers a hint of what they will encounter as they grow – though it will hopefully be a highly toned-down version of the brutal killings – and the price to pay to follow their dreams. Independence always comes with a price, which is the realization that, no matter how autonomous children grow to be, just like Henriette and Mary, they will never be utterly free. And being who they are, emerging from a disguise material or mental, is a battle that needs to be fought daily, within them as much as outside.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the pirate has become an important figure in children's and young adults' fiction. Literary pirates were provided with the potential to be heroes, "not simply in the mold of the misunderstood but noble corsairs of the romantic era, but as cynical, amoral, brutal adventurers," as American scholar Bradley Deane explains in the article "Imperial Boyhood: Piracy and the Play Ethic." (693) Subsequently, in the 20th and 21st centuries, the pirate sailed the literary seas to evolve into an ambivalent personage: expressing rebellion, liberation, eternal youth at play, as well as dissimulation, violence, perfidy and turpitude. The pirate, who seems caught between the paradigm of experience through adventure and the disenchantment of moving into the fossilizing conventions of adulthood, portrays the self in grappling of the growing child or teenager.

The pirate is, as was seen earlier, one of the many figures that bear the standard of adventure in children's literature, but its completeness and ambivalence make it a

particularly rich study case, which is why it was chosen to illustrate the point of this chapter. Good or evil, the corsair is adorned, in children's literature, with great ideals to inspire, ridicule to entertain, and cruelty to teach. Life under the Jolly Roger flag is an allegory of the earning of one's self-reliance. The Oxford Dictionary defines being independent as being "free from outside control; not depending on another's authority," as well as having the "capa[city] to think or act for oneself," which is the path towards which fictional pirates aim at directing children readers. Indeed, in pirate stories, the parental figure is either absent, hardly visible or simply inexistent, because it no longer is necessary to the characters' survival as they set out on their quest for new adventures – experiences at the end of which the pirate child will have become its own adult and guide, which serves as a symbol for the child reader's own expedition through aging.

The pirate figure also encourages its audience to reflect upon the concept of justice and to rethink the established order, the way Mary and Henriette started questioning their life choices, as well as realizing that what they had been promised might not actually be what they ended up with – adventure, wealth and equality can sometimes turn to massacres, unfairness and a captain who is never to be disputed. Annie Rolland describes reading as an "intimate rebellion, […] the one true antidote […] against preconceived ideas," and tales of piracy simply offer a more figurative illustration of that rebellious act. (202) The allegory of the corsair teaches the young readers that freedom is crucial but never free of charge, and that, on occasion, it might be necessary to rebel against authority and oppose the things or ideas they deem unjust. Piracy narratives also speak of bravery and of having a sense of community and collaboration even outside

of the family unit, which are precious values to impart to the growing minds of their young audience as they set out on their journey towards autonomy and adulthood.

> Reading is […] an opportunity to take a step to the side, to have time for oneself, clandestine or discreet, where [readers] imagine other possibles, where they comfort their critical minds. Where they earn a bit of distance, of "play" with their close family or friends' way of thinking and living. […] It is a byway to elaborate a singular identity, open and in movement, which will protect them from rushing into identity *prêts-à-porter*. (Renonciat 152)

And if the reading of adventure tales at sea or on land certainly does achieve to offer its readers an 'aside' from the reality that they know, it nevertheless seems to also imply that learning to be, for the child, invariably means learning to no longer be a child, learning to get out of childhood. Indeed, looking closely at the pirate stories, it is undeniable that the journey to self-discovery and freedom means becoming adult. The birth of a grown-up tends to mean the death of the child in its innocence (the she-pirates growing conscious remorse, Peter shouldering Hook's costume and nastiness, etc.). The way that children's literature addresses the subject is quite startling. The pirate is just one of the many inhabitants of adventure tales but all follow a similar pattern. Calling for the most amount of real-life pretend play – which is one of the earliest, most childish, form of play – but narrating underlying lessons on how to depart childhood, stories of learning to be, *simply,* are anything but.

Conclusion:

"Sometimes the questions are complicated and the answers are [also complicated]"[175]

Children's literature is still a fairly new genre of study and is regarded as a-temporal. As such, it is more often divided thematically than chronologically, which was also the case with my dissertation. My project was not to retrace the history of publishing for children but to follow and narrate the history of a long lifespan of the genre. It is a study of the psychological, educational, cultural and ethical repercussions that children's literature has on the audience it mobilizes. This literary history also displays the way in which the feeling of childhood has evolved over time; at least in the way adults see it. "The framing of discussions about childhood are […] influenced by the time and culture, as twentieth-century historians, anthropologists and sociologists have shown. How a person formulates responses to such questions, moreover, is also shaped by his or her perspective as an artist, biologist, economist, parent, philosopher or teacher," writes Andrea Immel, curator of the Cotsen Children's Library at Princeton University. (19)

The child protagonist is indeed a prismatic construction, reflecting real-life children, naturally, but also the authors' whims, the sales figures, the sociological, cultural, historical and anthropological studies, among other things. The child character is the embodiment of multiplicity. Bakhtin's statement that "the novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes a diversity of languages) and a diversity of

[175] Twist on a quote attributed to American author and illustrator for children, Dr. Seuss: "Sometimes the questions are complicated and the answers are simple."

individual voices, artistically organized," seems to stand particularly true in the case of children's literature. (1981 262) Indeed, the novel for the young is a convolution of voices: from the imagined child reader and child protagonist to the authors and editors, via the parents. It basks in its multiplicity and actually builds up the ambiguity of the messages it holds.

With this dissertation I wanted to give the feel that we were sort of growing along the children readers, at least in a manner of speaking. Starting with the origins of the genre of children's literature, its construction process and the goals it sets for itself, then moving towards picture books and the poetics of the domestic for the very young child who is read to, the first novels for the independent readers to explore their condition as children, and finally young adult stories on how to outgrow the child, I hope to have depicted the inner workings of this rather peculiar genre. Both the structure and the style were deliberate choices, as part of a narrative strategy to mirror the pace of a novel for the young, with a plot and a denouement. Children's literature follows a very specific timeline in storytelling, adjusted to the age target of its audience. My goal was to follow this timeline structurally, both with the evolution of topics within the genre according to the audience's age, and with a multidisciplinary approach at the beginning – to better understand the concepts at play – that would close in on the literary towards the end chapters.

French historian Philippe Ariès observed in *Centuries of Childhood* that, around 18th century Europe, as the idea of a child as precisely a child and not a small adult was coming to life, "it was recognized that the child was not ready for life, and that he had to be subjected to a special treatment, a sort of quarantine, before he was allowed to join the

adults." (412) The idea of a quarantined "special treatment" to ready the child for life might sound a bit odd, even amusing, to the modern mind, yet what I found with my research is that it is not such a far-fetched goal, and still holds some truth within children's literature, as of today.

Indeed, in the first part of this dissertation, I have tried to explain how the imaginary of childhood is created in literature, how it functions and where it stems from. I wondered what children's literature could reveal about its subject – who also doubles up as its audience. In doing so, I could not help but notice how the very imaginary of the possible that children's literature promotes is truly conceived as a special treatment or a quarantined time. Special in the sense that only in childhood does the crossing of thresholds seem possible, because of the high malleability and porosity that define it. It is a privileged time of endless playing and creative distortion. The child protagonist seems to reveal that "special intensity of existence which is the quintessence of youthful aspirations," to quote Joseph Conrad's *The Shadow Line*. (123) Children's literature seems tinged with the old Romantic motive that adventures are the prerogative of youth, a moment for explorations before one has to move on to reason and responsibilities.

Fiction sublimates childhood and authors of the genre have made it their own personal playground. Yet, one definitely can see how childhood in literature is also something that is quarantined, set aside, when authors of the genre keep trying to reach out for this lost child they once were; a child from whom they have been cut and a time past they will never recapture, except maybe – or so they hope – through their writings. The adult is no longer a child and the child is not yet an adult, not ready for life, not yet allowed to join the grown-ups.

The reality of children's literature is the reality of seeing childhood in a certain way, from a certain angle. The child is constructed as the "other" of the adult, something it once was but cannot get back to, something grown-ups set as different and separate, from the 18th century onwards. Upon this realization I could not help but think of how, in a similar fashion, the animal is often perceived as the "other" of the human, something it might also have been at one point in the history of life, and with whom mankind still desperately tries to communicate. Animality is an ongoing question in the humanities and social sciences, where it is displayed brimming with ambivalence: trying to erase the gap while simultaneously considering the animal as a big Other. These questions permeate through children's literature, and have done so since the very origins of the genre. Tales of hybrid children plague the scene from the 18th century to the early 19th, reflecting the otherness of one other, that is the child, into that of the other one, the animal. The child was then believed to be closer to nature than it was to adults, it being reported as more primitive and animal than the grown-ups who observed it. And so bringing them together in fiction was a way to try and understand both a little better. The otherness of the child does not stand alone in children's literature and raises many questions. Are all "others" the same, or can they be 'other' to one another? As the concept of the animal evolved, so did that of the child and, inspired by old fables and fairy tales, the 20th and 21st centuries saw a revival of the themes of anthropomorphism and metamorphosis, which were all the more ways to question the two notions.

Can the animal be used as a mimetic vessel to convey lessons to the pre-reading child in picture books? In its otherness, the anthropomorphic animal of picture books creates familiar patterns and sets in motion a complex identification process. The

completeness of the world in miniature offered by the animal tale grants true power to the child reader, that of displaying family life under a new light to allow the identifying and understanding of structures of behaviors and habits.

Can the animal also be used to mirror the changing body of the growing child? A reflection of the physical and sexual changes, animal metamorphosis is an open threshold to alterity, a new perspective on life as something no longer simply familiar and safe – the way it was with picture books – but as an entity always in movement, something the child might have to both battle and embrace, mirroring the morphed characters' inner struggles.

Is the child as close to the animal as was once thought? And, also, can the lines of otherness be renegotiated through fiction, allowing the adult to become child once again, to reach into the primitiveness of the animal? The plurality of each human being is a way in children's literature to echo both fears of isolation and hopes of unity. It simultaneously holds the power to bring a downfall or to open the way to new grandeurs of the mind, mirroring once again the potentialities of life itself. In renegotiating the lines between what makes the child and what makes the animal, fiction for the young explores the human condition and contains a certain therapeutic quality for the adults. Indeed, in bringing children and animals closer together it seems that what was once lost might be recaptured through the text, in a literary escape from society and responsibilities sort of way.

The animal trend has not faded out over time and its otherness is oddly used to depict what is familiar to the child, one otherness calling the other, tirelessly. The animal is a predominant figure of children's literature, and I chose to focus on the variations of

its use to show how it evolved in parallel to the social, cultural and historical evolution of the notion of the child – that is, the one that adults created. It also was a revealing means of exploring the feeling of otherness often felt by the growing child. There is a strangeness (both in terms of odd and foreign) of the body that takes place when the child grows, an unfamiliarity that finds itself reflected in the animal tales. Children's literature places its characters in an in-between, a transitory space that allows it to distill another way of being in the world to its audience.

Now, having let children run free for a time, and having explored all the otherness-es that characterize them, it would be time to "subject" them – to go on with Ariès's observational terms – to what will grant them access to adult life. And there again, children's literature is not exempt from the parallel to Ariès's historical evidence. Indeed, childhood is the special time of all possibles but childhood is also 'other' and therefore, no matter how freeing that may appear to the grown-ups, it must be educated and readied, which brings me to the third and final part of this dissertation. Children's literature is motivated by axiology and the idea of a textuality that orders and forms. It wants to educate through reading, to subject readers into becoming subjects, precisely, through social and cultural constructions. There is in children's literature a dual regime that is invariably present – divided between a disciplinary paradigm and a desire to entertain – and that sometimes labors to proportion its binarism. "The reader of this literature is always conceived, directly or indirectly, as an inchoative individual, in progression, in learning; the book – as indeed each and any experience – is accompanied by many lessons," states French scholar Nathalie Prince (25). The subjectification that children's literature tasks itself with is crucial, building identities through the reading

process and the identification reworkings of the protagonist's self, as was seen in my 7th chapter. Stories for children try to be representative and generative at the same time, reflecting what they think this child that they imagine is, and shaping it in return. The child protagonist, for all its difference from the adult, is written from a universalistic perspective, using the trope of the different, outcast hero to axiomatically teach the group all the values and ethics the genre deems fit. The pleasure of the fictional becomes a tool to teach how to be a child, what the appropriate interests are and which behaviors are to be expected. 'Child' no longer is an innocent word, if it ever even were so. It has become a genuine axiological "modalisateur"[176] that orientates the discourse and causes a valorization of the text and, consequently, of the object of the text. Childhood calls for fiction. It calls for education. In the relation that children's literature maintains with the idea of childhood that it creates, desire and its opposite are at play.

Indeed, the genre overflows with ambiguities, one of the main one being the desire to rekindle a vision of the unrestrained, innocent and carefree child, while making sure said child is growing towards outgrowing these very features. Authors of the genre claim to anyone who would listen that their goal is to encourage children to make the most of their childhood and to relish it but their work is tasked with making their audience grow emotionally and helping them develop their thinking skills. Children's literature is as much the language of all possibles as it is that of impediment and confinement. It teaches the pre-reading child (up to 4 or 5 years old), the beginner reader (i.e. 5 to 7 years old) and the independent reader (from about 8 to 11 or 12) how and what

[176] Modalisateur: linguistic means (morphological, lexical, syntactic and/or prosodic) by which the speaking subject discloses his/her attitude regarding what he/she states. I opted for keeping the word in French, as no English translation I could find seemed to convey this exact meaning.

to learn in order to be a child, only to better teach them how to unlearn being a child in the late independent reader stage and early teenage reader one.

Malleable yet extremely didactical, the genre rests upon ambivalence, a sort of impossibility. Indeed, the closer the reader gets to adolescence, the more the issue of joining the adults becomes pressing. Does it translate well to the young readers? The objective of children's literature is to create a mirror effect for children readers to reflect upon their own lives, in the light of the story. Children readers are confronted to a fictional version of themselves, to the author's imaginary vision of them as readers, and their own visions of themselves, all evolving together at the pace of the story. Thus children's literature not only raises questions on the act of reading itself – such as what does it mean to read fiction? – but also on how it may serve the subject formation and, consequently, what does it mean to read oneself, through this sort of *mise en abyme* of the child? Nathalie Prince believes that reading fiction always means putting oneself to "a level of original credulity. [… It means] lowering one's realism threshold, [and] trying hard to believe in things, in a world, in events and characters that would not withstand our suspicion a single second in reality." (150) Naturally, when one thinks of the fantastic adventures lived by the child protagonist, the veracity of Prince's statement is undeniable. And real-life children are aware of the hyperbolic dimension of the stories that target them. Yet, if it is merely a question of conscious temporary credulity, what does the genre have to offer to its audience, really? And if it has any relevance at all, how does it understand its own efficiency? Children's literature is diverse and mutable, it changes according to the perception that adults have of children and of what they must integrate in their readings. Yet it always strives to engage its readers into thinking about and

rethinking the world, as it promotes cognitive development. Literature for the young tries to give its readers what authors and editors believe children will want, as well as what they think they will need. It is based on foundational intentions but nonetheless holds manifold appeals. Children do enjoy them, rereading some over and over again – a bookmark always nestled somewhere within the cracked binding, – turning others into endless pretend playing, growing attached to a particular one sometimes to a passionate extent that will follow them far into their adult lives, etc.

American philosopher Martha Nussbaum once wrote that literature is "an extension of life not only horizontally, bringing the reader into contact with events or locations or persons or problems he or she has not otherwise met, but also, so to speak, vertically, giving the reader experience that is deeper, sharper, and more precise than much of what takes place in life." (40) I find this definition of reading quite relevant to the way children experience story. Although I have slight doubts as to the "deeper, sharper" part, I do think that children's experience of text is not linear but truly multidimensional, calling for visual and tactile as well as giving birth to pretend play and reworkings of the narrative to fit some of the real-life situations they encounter. These reworkings are particularly important as they allow children readers to create their own habits, their own patterns through the mimetic – and sometimes obsessive – connection they maintain with some select stories. They shape themselves through the reshaping of the narrative they produce, which creates both a familiarization – an initiation through habit – and a defamiliarization, to make way for the subject formation. As such, it is almost impossible to state once and for all which of the book or the child makes the child as we think of it, fiction for the young being the only genre of literature not to be

produced by the people who will read it. Far from discrediting childhood, it is my conviction that children's literature bestows a genuine active force of proposition upon it. Stories are essential because they allow readers to make sense of their world and reflect on themselves, and it stands true with the child reader. Stories will often give birth to pretend play, in which children will have the opportunity to reenact and redraw some of the questions or desires that their subconscious cannot yet process. Reading never stands alone, when it comes to children, but creates a variety of forks on the path to growth.

Of course, the idea of the child reader is a postulate assumed by the entire industry revolving around children's literature, from authors and editors to librarians, teachers, psychologists and literary scholars, myself included. It is an imaginary being kept in the corner of the mind, a reader that is written in the abstract and represents a sort of universalism of childhood that is a genuine axiom of the genre. It is also a slightly problematic imaginary construction, in terms of coherence, as it embraces all readers (even those who are read to), from the *Babar* reading one to the *Lord of the Rings* aficionado. It is a genre that evolves in a constant blur of delimitations while still trying to be self-confining. It truly cultivates ambiguities and evasiveness. Far from impairing or weakening it though, it is these very ambiguities that lead children's literature to experiment with topics and materials alike. Children's literature is an object that is both plural and moving, alternating and even sometimes entwining mimesis and diegesis. It strives to make the dynamic of the imaginary available for reflection.

And, if there is one universalism that stands true it is that all of our lives do begin and end with stories. Despite the fact that we still know very little about it, empirical studies have shown that children's literature does have an impact upon the audience it

targets. The American Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), which has for mission to study and improve education, has for instance conducted many surveys in partnership with authors of children's literature to get a better understanding of if and how stories affect children readers. American author Eric Kimmel's ASCD-led research on whether children's books can change children's values is a particularly relevant one. In the study, Kimmel comes to the conclusion that children seem to indeed be affected by their readings, but that whether they will remain so in the long run would prove difficult to establish. He also mentions that, especially with children as objects of study, the results will always be largely imbued with "the observer's intuition." (214) And, in truth, fiction often pours itself in the reading of reality when it comes to the study of children's literature and its audience. Researchers and authors need to let go of their own role of readers to become observers and accept children as they are instead of orienting them into being the way they think they should be. The whole field remains sadly tinged with a personal pull that does not end with authors trying to revive the child within – some colloquiums have actually taken place where scholars would discuss why their favorite book from childhood should be considered good literature, and most researchers still discuss the quirks of their own child as figureheads of all children. The genre also suffers from a growing (greedy) market that overproduces stories, like mere commodities, for the sake of profit and to the detriment of quality – which is an important fact to take note of despite being something I purposely put aside in this dissertation, as the focus was on the literary.

As of 2014, the market of children's literature placed second in the overall sector of the publishing industry in France, first in the United Kingdom (having overtaken the

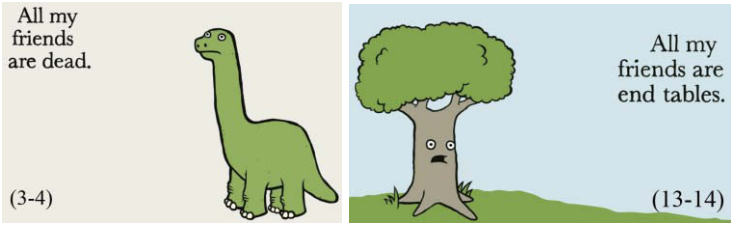
so-called "adult" literature) and a very close second to adult non-fiction (after two years of ranking first) in the United States.[177] Children's fiction no longer is the weak relative of literature and displays a considerable resistance in an age when the breadth of audiovisual medias is so substantial – which is also noteworthy, although not the object of this project. With its ever-growing popularity and strong financial lucrativeness, it seems that everyone wishes to dabble in writing for children. Celebrities' attempts to jump on the bandwagon of this popular trend multiply. From Madonna to Whoopi Goldberg or even Barak Obama and Paul McCartney in literature of the English language to French authors Maryse Condé who declared at Paris-Sorbonne University in June 2013 that she would no longer write for adults – "Je crois que j'ai dit tout ce que j'avais à dire. *La Vie sans fards* sera mon dernier livre pour adultes,"[178] – as she was preparing a West Indian take on *Snow White* for the following Fall, or Olivier Adam and Anna Gavalda who both regularly write for children, the appeal of children's literature is on a steady rise. And yet, it remains one of the sectors where authors' remuneration is on the lower scale, a clear sign that its popularity does not always equal recognition. "How come we are the weakest link of a system that generates 57.8 billions of Euros?" wonders French

[177] According to the market studies of the SNE (Syndicat National de l'Edition, France) and the AAP (Association of American Publishers), as well as UK analyst John Lewis's data collection for the Bookseller Marketing & Publicity Conference of 2014. Web. < http://www.sne.fr/secteur_edit/jeunesse-2/> <http://www.publishers.org/press/138/> <http://www.thebookseller.com/childrens-conference/programme.html>

[178] "I believe I have said all I had to say. *La Vie sans fards* [published in 2012] will be my last book for adults." Comments made by Maryse Condé during the study day dedicated to her life and work on June 8th 2013, at the Paris-Sorbonne University, and reported in the French newspaper *Metronews* on June 20th 2013.
Bakèla, Dolores. "Maryse Condé : "J'arrête la littérature pour adultes."" *Metronews.* June, 20th 2013. Web. <http://www.metronews.fr/culture/maryse-conde-j-arrete-la-litterature-pour-adultes/mmft!Af0lVHzmoV1ag/>

author and illustrator for the young Clothilde Delacroix in a plea for improved conditions and appreciation.[179]

Children's literature still has a long way to go in order to be acknowledged as being more than a little journey to a primal, simpler land of childhood. This view is especially reductive and indicates a lack of attention given to the genre, which actually cultivates its hybridity in its audience also, trying to please the parent behind the child as much as the youngsters themselves. It is often filled with intertextual references, subtexts, puns and double-meanings, because of the authors' awareness of this twofoldness of their audience. Lemony Snicket's characters bearing the name Baudelaire is one example, as are the allegories of Nazism in *Harry Potter* – the evil wizard Grindelwald's "For the greater good" slogan carved above the entrance to the Nurmengard prison for people of the opposition will certainly ring the adult reader's bell, (7: 772-773) – or the prickly macabre humor of Monsen's and John's books: *All My Friends Are Dead* and *All My Friends Are Still Dead.*



Children's literature is anything but simple and addresses more than it seems, both in terms of audience and topics. In fact, it is not only the writing of children's literature that has grown in popularity over the last 15 years. A new generation of adults,

[179] In a call for mobilization article published in La Charte des auteurs et des illustrateurs jeunesse (a registered association of French and Francophone authors, illustrators, translators and a few editors that strive to protect their rights and improve both their working conditions and the genre of children's literature). Delacroix, Clothilde. "Les auteurs, bientôt tous à poil ? Mobilisons-nous !" *La Charte des auteurs et des illustrateurs jeunesse.* (2014). <http://la-charte.fr/magazine/dossiers-en-cours/article/les-auteurs-bientot-tous-a-poil?var_recherche=mati%C3%A8re%20premi%C3%A8re>. Web.

who grew up with the likes of Frodo or Harry, keeps buying teen and young adult fiction for themselves. Meyer's *Twilight* series circulates evenly between the young and older readers, and so do Collins's *The Hunger Games* or Dashner's *The Maze Runner*. With these series having turned into the driving engine of Hollywood (children and young adult novels now get more film adaptations than any other genre of literature), the line between children and adults seems to have become even fuzzier. To the point where publishing companies have started drawing up partnerships to officially and concurrently target both age categories for the same book. The 2014 French translation of *Moriarty*, a detective fiction set in the world of Sherlock Holmes, by British writer Anthony Horowitz, has thus been published under two different houses and with two different titles to best appeal to both the elder crowd and the younger one, respectively. Calmann-Lévy editions named their grown-up version with a classic: *Moriarty : Une aventure de Sherlock Holmes* (Moriarty: A Sherlock Holmes Adventure), while Hachette Jeunesse opted for a more gripping title with: *Sherlock Holmes est mort. Vive Moriarty* (Sherlock Holmes is dead. Long live Moriarty). If the advertizing is still slightly distinct, the fact remains that the readings are the same and it shows the growing irrelevance of age categories in a time when adults do not seem to want to let go of the passions of their youth. "The unassailable ascendancy of the fan has made children of us all," claims *New York Times* critic A.O. Scott, who believes it to be both a blessing and a curse, as it entails a risk for immaturity and authority crises as well as a potentiality for a greater sense of freedom and happiness. When "identities are in perpetual flux, […] the world [can be] our playground," Scott adds.

Which brings the questions: how do adults play and what happens when they do – if there is still any relevance to the age distinction? But that would be an entirely different story to tell (well, maybe) and this is where I must leave the readers, with the fittingness of Mark Twain's parting words in *Tom Sawyer*:

> It being strictly a history of a boy, it must stop here; the story could not go much further without becoming the history of a man. When one writes a novel about grown people, he knows exactly where to stop – that is, with a marriage; but when he writes of juveniles, he must stop where he best can. (314)

Appendices:

Interview with French author François Delecour – November 28th 2012, Montreuil, France

Me: Good afternoon, François Delecour, and thank you.

FD: Hello! And you are very welcome.

Me: You are here to promote your latest picture book, *Linh et la fleur du bonheur*. Can you talk a little bit about this?

FD: Absolutely. It's the story of a little girl's dream and how it teaches her a sort of wisdom of life. Dreams can teach us so much, it's the most important and most beautiful thing we can share with the young readers. It's also about happiness, how to find it and recognize it within oneself. It's an idea that is very important to the genre of children's literature and the education of children but it is also something that is not conceptualized very often.

Me: The story falls into several popular trends: it has an Asian spiritual vibe and it deals with issues of environment, nature. Were you aware of these influences on the market of children's literature when you started writing *Linh*?

FD: Yes, I was aware that these themes are on a rise lately, but in the far back of my mind. It was not what motivated my choice of story. I love Vietnam, it's a beautiful place and there is an oneiric quality to Asia that I admire deeply. It is linked to a wisdom inspired by Buddhism I suppose. Teachings like you are part of a whole, and there is joy in the simple. In the world that we live in there is so much stress and materialism, I think

it's good to take a step back and become aware of the so much more that life is. It's an important thing to remember.

Me: So it's a "wise" take on the classic children's literature goal of helping young readers figure out their place in the world?

FD: Yes, you could say that. Also a way to tell them that whatever happens, they have a place in the world, like all things. And they will always have dreams.

Me: If you had to define the purpose of children's literature, what would you say?

FD: That's a tough one! [pauses] I would say it's to help kids grow, emotionally and intellectually. To reassure them and to make them think at the same time. And then to share their knowledge and their thoughts with the world. We educate children but they educate adults to, their parents and their teachers, those of us who write for them. And I hope I can help with this process. In my opinion, the best teacher is, first and foremost, always a student, sharing what he/she has learned.

Me: Why picture books, rather than novels?

FD: Two reasons, or two main ones, more like. First, I like the younger children; they have such an open and imaginative way of seeing the world. It's beautiful really. They see a story like *Linh*, with flowers or animals talking to the character and don't think "it's impossible," they just live the story and immerse themselves in the message. Life is beautiful, not "dragonflies don't talk." And then, there are the images. Picture books are such works of art. And Sophie's [Adde, the illustrator of *Linh*] work is

amazing! It's vibrant and I feel like it really speaks to you when you open the book. So you have thoughts and images, and you can let the universe grow inside of you. It's like breathing life into a dream.

Me: One last question. Who do you have in mind when you write?

FD: My children, and fragments of memories of my youth.

Me: Thank you very much.

FD: Anytime!

Interview with French illustrator Sophie Adde – November 28th 2012, Montreuil, France

Me: Hello, Sophie Adde, and thank you.

SA: Hi! And, of course, it's a pleasure.

Me: *Linh et la fleur du bonheur* is your first work of illustration for children. Can you talk about your experience?

SA: It's something I had been wanting to do for a long time. I love picture books. Works like that of Merlin or Nathalie Novi [illustrators for children], among others, are simply amazing, and I have found myself roaming the aisles of pictures books in bookstores many times. Between you and I, I totally buy them for myself, but eventually I share them with my daughter. [laughing] I have worked with textile and various types of painting over the course of my career, but illustrating a book for children, bringing images to the narration, it's very special. And I am very grateful for the opportunity. I hope to keep at it.

Me: Despite it being your first illustration work, you seem very familiar with the universe. Can you talk about the recent metaphorical trend, in which *Linh* falls?

SA: Children always seem so busy living life. I think that's partly why edition for children started marketing stories on what life is and how to preserve it. Well, you know, that and all of the natural catastrophes, the climate changes and the human impact on the planet that keep making the news, which led writers and illustrators to want to educate

children to a better future. Ah, and of course, there is also the influence and growing popularity of things such as yoga and Buddhism that try to bring balance to the stressful modern life we lead. I think we just want to draw children's attention to the fact that life and nature are a treasure, and get reminded of it as well, as adults, as we read along.

Me: Do you think children's literature helps with the education of children? And how?

SA: I think it can help them get a better grasp of some ideas, like that of happiness in *Linh*, for example. It's also a very ingenious way to create a new kind of interaction between parent and child, as you read through and discuss the story. It becomes a sort of safe space to adapt the adventures, good or bad, lived by the characters to real-life, and maybe this way the child gets to purge fears or voice interrogations and desires.

Me: What were your inspirations for *Linh*'s illustrations?

SA: My travels, definitely! And I think it's also a very important thing to share with kids. A taste for exploration, for daring to dream something and making it happen.

Me: Would you say that children also influence the genre?

SA: I think so, yes. I know that my daughter had a big influence over my work and it's probably safe to say that a lot of writers have their kids in mind when they write a new story. Plus, there are also some themes that were entirely created by children and the industry just went along with it, you know. Like, do you know about that mermaid thing?

Me: With transgender children, you mean?

SA: Yes, pretty cool, right?

Me: It is very interesting, yes. Would you give me your opinion on it?

SA: Sure. I am friends with a couple of illustrators for children, and as I said, I have always been fascinated by the genre so it's something that comes up in discussions quite often. I think it started about 5 years ago or so, when we could actually identify it as a growing phenomenon. And talking about it, none of us had ever thought about such a thing. Yet, it makes so much sense! How smart of transgender children to have figured it out, that with mermaids they could be any gender they felt like, with no explicit body differences and no one to judge them. Of course, mermaids aren't new to children's literature. I mean, Disney's Ariel is iconic, but now they are no longer mere Barbie-like creatures targeting girly girls only. Now, you see the emergence of an actual reflection or a kind of philosophy behind the scales. There is something really freeing in not having to be or act like a certain gender, and I think it's great that children came to rock the boat and change our conceptions, you know. Sure, there is sill a huge amount of pink glittery sea creatures, but there is a hint of something more, that I personally can't wait to see grow in the future.

Me: What about the materials that you use? Are they different when you illustrate for children?

SA: I gave it a lot of thought before I started on *Linh*. I had worked a lot with recycled newspapers from my travel, in my paintings, and I guess it has become my style, so to speak. I wanted to keep it with the illustrations and the editors were very nice, allowing me to use the same process, first the collage of old newspaper, then a watercolor base for the décor and finally a third and final layer with the characters, birds, flowers, etc. I guess it worked well with the theme of the story, so it was great, especially for a first time. Though I have to say I found it way harder than making paintings.

Me: Really? How so?

SA: Well, you have to stick to the story of course, but also a standard page size. Plus, you have children in mind when you work and it was a different experience, having an actual target. But I enjoy the challenges it brings. Working to appeal and convey a message at the same time, it's very cool.

Me: Thank you so much for your time.

SA: Thank you!

Interview with British author Alex Scarrow – November 29th 2012, Montreuil, France

Me: Hello, Alex Scarrow, and thank you for meeting with me.

AS: Hey! Sure!

Me: You are the author of the super popular science fiction series for tweens and teens *TimeRiders*. Yet, you haven't always been writing for the young. Your career path has taken you from guitar to computer games design and screenplay writing, so why the final switch to a younger target reader?

AS: I'm a bit of a kid myself to be honest. [grinning] Ok, more than a bit. I like to experiment. And I have always been a huge fan of science fiction, but it's not the most appreciated genre. A lot of people don't think of it as real literature, kind of like what some say about children's literature, or young adults'. Also, science fiction for adults doesn't pay well at all and, you know, I still have to pay the bills! But what I'm trying to say is that the world of literature for the young is less rigid, the readers are open to anything and so, as writer, it also allows me to do anything I feel like.

Me: And it pays the bills?

AS: [laughing] Yeah, it does. It is a very commercial sector. And, it's a fun one to work with!

Me: In *TimeRiders*, your three main characters work "underground" as time travelers to try and fix the things that went wrong in the past. They have been recruited just moments before they were about to die. Even with this, time is crucial, heavy, and at the core of the narrative. Why make it your focal point?

AS: It's the idea of the "what if?," you know? What if things had happened differently? What if we could go back and prevent or change? These are questions that have animated men since the dawn of time. It rings true both on a global level, with events like World War II for example, and on a personal one. I mean I don't think there is one person who hasn't thought at one point: "Why did I do this? What if I had done that instead?" Like "what if I had asked that girl out?" or "what if I had become famous as a musician instead of playing it safe with econ?" Something along those lines.

Me: And fiction for the young allows you to explore these imaginary "what if-s?"

AS: Completely! It's something I had already had a small taste of when I was designing computer games. With literature, I get to fully dive into it. There is no limit to the imaginary in children's or young adults' literature. Because the earnestness does not lie with the events per say, but with the emotions, the reactions of the character. It's amazing!

Me: Who inspires the creation of your characters?

AS: [thinking] I want to say me. There is a lot of me in my characters, features of mine that I develop into different characters. Like Liam, that's the me who seriously needs to grow up. [laughing] Maddy could be a great portrait of me when I feel stressed,

under pressure. As for Sal… no idea! But then they also are mostly imaginary. I give them a push to start but then they kind of end up taking a life of their own.

Me: Would you say the same thing happens with your readers? If your characters develop a life of their own, could your readers use the novels as a push and grow from there?

AS: I hope so! It'd be pretty cool to think I have this power. But yeah, I want to believe it. As a reader you always take a lot from the characters you feel close to, and then you adapt it to your life. Like, if there is this one character you identify with, don't you picture them in other situations sometimes? What would they do? Say? Etc.

Me: You like to raise questions more than to answer them, then?

AS: [laughing] I suppose. Answers are interpretations. I give mine and then the readers add theirs.

Me: So, again it takes life?

AS: Exactly!

Me: Thank you very much!

AS: Thank you.

Interview with British author Michael Morpurgo – November 30th & December 2nd 2012, Montreuil, France

Me: Michael Morpurgo, hello! Thank you for meeting with me.

MM: Hi! Pleasure to meet you.

Me: You have written more than a hundred books over the course of your career as a writer. Why write for children?

MM: To me it's no different than writing for adults. I don't write with a specific age group in mind. Books are supposed to make you think, make you reflect on yourself and on the world. I hope that's what I'm doing with my work. And that it makes everyone think, children and adults alike.

Me: So, no hidden message?

MM: No, readers will take anything they want or can out of it. It's the thinking process that matters more than what is said, at least that's how I see it. I think it's also a way to deal with things past, ponder why they happened and what led us to where we are now.

Me: Is that your main reason for writing about war?

MM: True. I guess having been born in [19]43 it was a pressing issue when I grew up, reflecting on all that happened and the way people reacted.

Me: Your novel, *War Horse*, was written from the perspective of the animal. Was it a way to distance yourself and the readers from the horrors of war?

MM: In a way, yes. Writing from the point of view of the horse was more neutral. An animal has no side, per say. It's about the experience of the war, and all sides suffered from it. So many died, British, German, French, and many others. I was hoping to show war under a new light, to show the importance of remembering everyone and everything.

Me: Do you have anyone in mind when you write?

MM: Not really, I don't think. Although I will say this: you should always write for yourself, never have others in mind. It is the only way to make the stories ring true.

Me: If you had to define the purpose of children's literature, what would you say?

MM: I don't exactly believe in the categorization but reading I do believe in. And I think it is the only way for children to make sense of who they are, to get a better grasp of the world around them, and comprehend their interactions with others. The world we live in is very complex and growing up is hard. So the more you read, the more you come to know and then it's a little bit easier to navigate the world.

Me: *War Horse* was made into a film last year [2011, then]. How do you feel about the increase of film adaptations of books for children and young adults?

MM: I think it's great. It exposes even more children to stories and history. Kids who might not have picked up a book willingly might want to check the story behind the movie they just saw, if they liked it.

Me: Last question. Do you really collect socks?

MM: [chuckling] It is the rumor, isn't it?

Me: Thank you very much.

MM: Thank you.

Interview with French illustrator Johan Troianowski – November 30th 2012, Montreuil, France

Me: Good morning, Johan Troianowski, and thank you again for this interview.

JT: Hey! Sure, I'm happy to do it.

Me: You're celebrating the publication of your third album for children. Can you talk a little about your experience so far?

JT: Yes, it's great! I love every minute of it! My first two albums, *Rouge* [series], were all illustrated with crayons and watercolors. It was also the first time I was writing a full story. I had done some illustration works and blogs before that but this was my first full publication, so exciting!

Me: *Rouge* is very bright and colorful. It's also busy. Every corner of the page is exploited with drawings. And now your new album, *Pome*, is mostly black and white, drawn with India ink, with a dash of crayons and felt pens here and there. Your tools are very interesting. Apart from the ink, they are colors and textures than children can easily recognize, as they are the ones they too use. Is that deliberate?

JT: More or less. I like the idea of creating something that kids will identify with, to a certain extent. Something that they feel is close to their world. So using material that they know it's a way of connecting with them. Plus, I like it. I like experimenting with different nuances of colors and, as you said, textures. It's not exactly the same once it goes through the printing process but crayons for example are rough, granular. It makes

you want to run your fingers on the drawing. And then with the felt pens, the color is brighter and more intense. Also, the colors are less nuanced than with the crayons, they are more primary. I find it interesting.

Me: And why the India ink, then?

JT: Well, that is a more personal choice. You see as a child I was terrified of *Alice in Wonderland*. I mean the story, and then Tenniel's illustrations, such a bizarre world. But as I grew and started working in the field, I became fascinated by it, rather than scared. So I guess I wanted to give a shot at black and white and a more classic form of illustration. Even if my style is nothing like Tenniel's engravings.

Me: When you work on illustrations for children, what do you think matters most?

JT: I think details are very important in the image. They need to be as realistic as possible, even in the world of endless possibilities that is the child's imaginary. It is the details that will help the little kid with deciphering the story and expressing his/her relationship to the world. I guess that's why some of my drawings are so crowded. I want the image to kind of burst, like life does. The image is the key, the true center of the story in picture books and it needs to be as explicit as possible, while still lifting the child towards the magic lands of storytelling and story-making.

Me: I don't want to take you away from your book signing any longer so thank you very much again, and best of luck with the future.

JT: Thanks! And same to you!

Lunch interview with French author Erik L'Homme and his editor Thierry Laroche, Gallimard Jeunesse Editions – November 30th 2012, Montreuil, France

Me: Erik L'Homme, hello! Thank you for taking the time to talk with me.

ELH: Hello! You're welcome. Go ahead and grill me!

Me: Nearly every single one of your characters is what youngsters would call a "tweenager", not yet a teenager, more like a big child. I assume that it is a deliberate choice. May I ask the reason behind it?

ELH: Yes, of course. Well, at first I guess it just felt more natural that way to me. As you said, I usually create characters who are about 13 years old, and to accomplish that I need to level myself to them. I mean I try to figure out what their outlook on things would be. I try to see the world through their eyes, the way they would or could see it. So I just try and remember the 13 year-old boy I used to be. It's a very powerful age, you know? At 13 you're not really a child anymore but you're not an adult either. It's a transitional time, a decisive moment with so much at stake, so much hanging in the air. Does that make sense?

Me: I think so, yes, thank you. Now, from the perspective of an author, would picking this particular transitory age give you more freedom to play with your characters and the narratives?

ELH: [chuckling] I suppose it does. I feel something special towards that age category and writing them in stories… I don't know, it's pretty great. Making a child

grow into an adolescent in a fantasy book is the best thing a writer could experience. Indeed, by doing so, one can encompass many a change in their character's life and personality. The magic of adolescence and the infinite realm of the fantasy genre allow for an ever-changing, ever-evolving character, and plot. They can be the source of an unparalleled palette of emotions. As a writer, what more could you possibly ask for?

Me: Is that infinite realm of possibilities the reason you chose to turn to fantasy?

ELH: It's definitely one of the reasons, yes. Also because I like the genre and it's easier to write if you think it's something you might also have liked to read yourself. And in fantasy the lines between the true and the false are blurrier, so you can constantly renegotiate them. It's an idea that I like, being able to renegotiate. I'm sort of terrified by how much control society has over us.

Me: Ok, I apologize in advance but I have to ask. There is this rumor going around about you believing you were an actual alien when you were a kid. Is that true? And if it is, was that an inspiration too?

ELH: [laughing] Oh yes, it's true. I felt so different when I was growing up that I had convinced myself that I must have been an alien, probably important too, like a prince of some sort, and I had been placed on Earth in a human family. I kept nagging my parents, with what I believed then to be subtlety, for hints to unveil the truth. But I'm totally fine now, because obviously I AM an alien! [pauses] Ok, maybe don't write this in your dissertation… I have a feeling it's too late. Oh well, now the truth will come out.

Me: Ah, it all makes so much sense now. Also, definitely too late, yes. Seriously, though, it's interesting because in your novels you can really feel the idea of difference as a strong presence. Something all your characters are, with their superpowers and all, yet something they fear deeply; in an allegory to growing up sort of way.

ELH: Exactly. Feeling different when you are young is a terrible thing, but one that everybody goes through. And my characters they have great powers but at the beginning they don't want them and as the plot moves forward you can really see their struggles. They try to adapt to their differences and master them, but it's not easy. Growing up is very hard, so is learning to accept yourself the way you are.

Me: Does that mean that, with your writing, you are trying to ease the transition into adulthood, so to speak?

ELH: I try. I just have profound memories of my own interrogations and the things that I have learned over the course of my life, things that I want to share with the readers. If it helps them then that's great. And if it's nothing more than a good time spent with a book in hand, that's good too.

Me: What are the main things that you want to share with your audience?

ELH: Maybe that if they feel different, they should know that every other kid around them feels that way too, even the ones they admire or fear. Every person sees the world differently and it's part of what makes it interesting. So maybe they should start thinking about how others see things or see themselves? It's the question that made me want to write, in the first place. How do others see the world? [pauses] Also, I like to

think, at least I really hope it's the case, that my characters help the readers realize that people are not always good or bad, that not everything in life is black and white. So I like to mix it up a little, have characters that seem bad but turn out good and vice versa. It's all about circumstances, more than labels.

Me: These are great messages to convey, especially in today's world, with all the pre-labeled bad guys or good guys children see on TV. Speaking of society, do you feel particularly influenced by the market?

ELH: Not really, no. But then again you might want to ask Thierry [Laroche, his editor] that. He's the one in charge of reining me in if I go too wild. Honestly I am an introvert and I just like to write completely secluded, at home, in the silence, with lots of books lying around. And I guess I have been influenced in my taste, by the novels I enjoyed, like Dumas or Tolkien, but I don't think about it when I write. At least not consciously.

Me: Thank you. One last question, if that's ok?

ELH: Fire away!

Me: I know you have written for adults too, very serious books on culture and travel, in Pakistan notably. Why keep your fiction work in children's literature only?

ELH: I enjoy it. It's a good way to look back into your life with a new perspective. And, as I told you earlier, in my experience there is nothing better for a

writer than to create characters that are always changing. Whatever crazy adventure you want them to live it's fine because they will bounce back.

Me: Thank you very much again!

ELH: My pleasure.

Me: Thierry Laroche, thank you as well.

TL: Sure, it's fun. I get to share Erik's glory for once. [laughs]

Me: Can we get back to the market question, then? How are the popular trends established?

TL: Right now there are two major influences that we can recognize. The Anglo-Saxon market, which is HUGE, with all the big novels like *Harry Potter* or *The Hunger Games*. And then I'd say there is a big influence coming from Japan as well. Mangas have been a hit with teenagers in the past 15 years or so. I supervise 2 sectors at Gallimard Jeunesse: the comic books and the children's literature, all the novels from like 7 years old to what we call young adults. So I can really see how these two "cultures" so to speak play a big part on what we choose to publish. And they play a big part in the themes that we pick. Right now it's all about fantasy and dystopian worlds. We also keep an eye on the popular trends in the media. What do kids like to watch on TV? What do teenagers? Etc. For example, Erik's *Le Livre des étoiles* series worked really well

because it was fantasy and it was based on existing Celtic mythology. It's the magical combo, the J.K. Rowling [author of the *Harry Potter* books]! [laughs]

Me: I see. And do you think there is a specific French take on the themes? A different way of dealing with them?

TL: I believe so, yes. The culture is different so of course the perception of things will be too. It's like what Erik said earlier: we all have a different way of seeing the world. And if it's true with individuals, imagine what happens when you add national or continental variations to that!

Me: Would you have an example in mind?

TL: Let me think… Well, again, it's something that Erik said before, about good and evil, you remember? I think it's particularly obvious with some of the production coming from the USA for example. It's striking, from the very beginning of the novel, who is going to be the hero and who will be the horrible nemesis. And you're rarely wrong, it rarely changes. I like to think that in France we can be a bit subtler, and offer narratives that are less straightforward, more in tune with the real life that awaits our readers. Of course, it totally depends on the book, not everything that is published should be, to be honest.

Me: Yes, with the growing popularity of the genre of children's literature, there has been an overproduction lately. How many manuscripts do you typically receive each year?

TL: A lot! Somewhere between 1000 and 3000 every year, and that's just for people on the outside. I'm not counting the manuscripts from authors with whom we already work.

Me: That's a lot. And about 1000 do get published each year, nationally. Is that right?

TL: That's correct, yes. With all the different publishing houses, it comes to about 1000.

Me: Do you feel that the number affects the quality of what comes out?

TL: To some extent, yes, it must, unfortunately. Not with Gallimard Jeunesse, of course! [laughs]

Me: To get back to the French specificity. I have noticed in my research that there is something quite distinctive with the French take on the vampire trend. Have you noticed it? And could you maybe elaborate a little on why you think that is?

TL: Ah, the vampire! It has become quite the go-to theme, hasn't it? Well… If by different take you mean we don't go into over-sexualized sparkly teenage vampires falling in love with the plain high school girl, then I guess yes, there is a difference in the way the French deal with vampires in children's literature. And don't get me wrong, I like *Twilight*! But I'm a guy, and I have a little boy, and I don't know, it does not talk to me personally, you know what I mean? Ok, I'm totally digressing here. Hmmm… Yes, there is something about the French vampire for kids, it's not the complete horror of

classic literature either, a sort of unease, more like. Something disturbing and threatening, but I honestly have no idea where it comes from, I'm sorry.

Me: It's fine, really. I greatly appreciate your time already and I know you both have to run so thank you again.

TL: Really, it was our pleasure. It's pretty cool you get to work on this, so thanks for including us as well.

Interview with American author Ransom Riggs – December 1st 2012, Montreuil, France

Me: Ransom Riggs, hello, and thank you.

RR: Hi!

Me: Your novel, *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*, is very original, atypical if we compare it to so called "classic" children's literature. You weaved your narrative based on a collection of vintage and odd photos in black and white. What gave you this idea?

RR: As a kid, my grandmother used to drag me to second-hand shops and garage sales, which was a torture. But there were often boxes of old snapshots that I would rummage through and some fascinated me. I kept some and one day I realized it was like living with ghosts. And they are disturbing because you can feel that there is a back-story behind the picture but you don't know what it is. It's uncanny and I wanted to give them their lost memories back, in a way.

Me: Your hero, Jacob, is 16. Did you always want to write for young adults?

RR: Not at all, that was completely accidental actually. I studied film and I had not particularly thought about writing. And then, writing *Miss Peregrine*, I had no specific age group in mind. I think it can be read by all. Jason Rekulak [editor/publisher at Quirk Books, Philadelphia] thought that it could be marketed as young adult because

of the age of the narrator, and the fact that Jacob is very honest, very raw in his emotions, which I guess can speak to teenagers.

Me: The theme is also something that will speak to growing readers. Your characters, no matter how weird or creepy, are desperately trying to find themselves.

RR: Yes, it's true. They have these powers, which sometimes are horrendous, that they try and master, or at least accept. I think that is true to all people though, children or adults.

Me: Do you feel that there is anything specific that a targeted literature for children or young adults can offer its readers?

RR: That's an interesting question, one that many people in the industry still try to figure out. I am not classic, as you said, and I was far from being an erudite of the genre when I started so my answer might be a bit off. I feel like books and photos can make you think and imagine. It's why the snapshots are so important in my work, because when you look at them you start making stories in your head, automatically. And it gets you to think on other things, things that are relevant to your own life. So I would say that tailoring narratives, as it invites teens or children to read, could be an asset because it makes them think.

Me: Thank you very much!

RR: My pleasure.

Interview with French editor Arthur Hubschmid, editorial director at L'Ecole des Loisirs Editions – December 3rd 2012, Montreuil, France

Me: Hello, M. Hubschmid, and thank you for taking a few minutes to talk to me.

AH: Hello! You are quite welcome.

Me: You are one of the pioneers of children's literature in France, having created L'Ecole des Loisirs with Jean Fabre in the early 60s. Would you mind talking about your experience a little?

AH: Not at all. Actually it all started at a book fair, kind of like this. Except it was terribly boring, on textbooks for school. And so Jean [Fabre] and I we thought we would have a look at children's stories instead and we liked it. So we started L'Ecole des Loisirs, publishing about 4 to 7 books each year, we were quite small then. And we only published imported stories, from the US and Sweden, mostly. Because there was not much written in France back then, you see. And suddenly, after May 68, people started looking at what we were doing. They thought it was great, a less rigid way to get children to read and learn. We stopped importing as people started writing here as well. From then on it just kept getting bigger and bigger, and here we are!

Me: Here you are indeed, still one of the most lucrative house on the market of children's literature today. L'Ecole des Loisirs has the particularity of maintaining a very tight relation with schools, which is the case with no other publishing house in France. What were the reasons behind the decision to work directly with schools?

AH: Well at first we were into textbooks, as I mentioned earlier. And the market was nearly inexistent so it made sense. Moreover we were not sure that all families would be able to afford books for their children, or even want them – don't get me started on my childhood! – so distributing them through the schools was good for two reasons: it looked more important to the adult eye than if it had been "just a story" in a library or bookstore, and it was cheaper, because children could subscribe for the school year and pay less and receive a new book each month. You look young enough that you probably had the opportunity to do that yourself.

Me: Indeed, I did. It was my favorite time of the month, when the teacher would distribute them. So, I know you said not to but can I get you started on your childhood?

AH: [smiling] Very strict parents, very religious. No sports, no books (save for the Bible) and no play. And then I met this wonderful librarian who introduced me to the world of fiction and I fell in love, I became passionate and ravenous for literature. I suppose it is this drive that all of us in the industry try to emulate through the stories we publish. Oh, I must be going, book fairs and talks, you know… [lifting his eyebrows] Best of luck!

Me: Thank you very much, I really appreciate it!

Interview with Loïc Jacob and Chung-Liang Yeh, founders and editors of HongFei Cultures Editions – December 3rd 2012, Montreuil, France

Me: Hello! Thank you for taking the time to talk with me.

LJ: Hello! You're very welcome.

CLY: Yes, it's a pleasure, not to mention good publicity. [laughing]

Me: You are the founders of HongFei, a publishing house which was created in 2007 and aims at bringing together Chinese stories with French illustrative works, is that correct?

LJ: Absolutely! In today's world, we thought it was important to expose children to stories from the great "elsewhere." And to give them a better understanding of alterity, without sounding too didactical or trying to be "exotic."

CLY: Yes, we try to select stories that will make the readers think. We publish poems, folktales, fables and any story that tells something about being human, about being one in the world or with the world. We want children to get a taste for travels, dreams, the unknown and the other.

Me: The industry of children's literature is very competitive. What has been your experience with the market so far?

CLY: I would say it has been pretty good. The beginnings were difficult but after a while people started to notice our work and invite us to book fairs, like this one, which

helped a lot. Also, I think that since we relocated outside of Paris it has become slightly easier. Less stressful at least. I don't know.

LJ: Yes, we are not a very big house but we have received support from many. The CRILJ [Centre de Recherche et d'Information sur la Littérature pour la Jeunesse – Center for Research and Information on Children's Literature], for one, helped with our promoting by inviting us to talk. That and the workshops and the book fairs.

Me: The books you publish are generally different from what is "out there," yet they fall into the recent "Asian" trend, so to speak. Did it help? And do you plan on branching out were the popularity to fade?

LJ: Of course, it must have helped, and like every sector in publishing, it is as much a matter of luck and networks as it is of hard work. Things have been going well for 5 years now and we certainly hope it will continue. As of now, we are not planning on branching out too much. We have stories coming out that will not be set in Asia, yet the general themes are the same.

CLY: We need to fight the monopoly of big houses! [laughing] I'm joking they are all very nice, despite the competitiveness. But, yes, as Loïc said, we don't plan on branching out or blending in too much. I think, and hope!, that the subjects of diversity and exploration will always be popular, no matter which country is "in" at the time.

Me: Thank you both very much!

LJ & CLY: Our pleasure!

Interview with Hedwige Pasquet, general director of Gallimard Jeunesse Editions – December 3rd 2012, Montreuil, France

Me: Hello! And thank you for meeting me.

HP: Hello! My pleasure.

Me: You have been working with Gallimard Jeunesse for more than 30 years and are responsible, among other things, for the French publication of *Harry Potter*. Can you talk about your experience and the evolution of the industry?

HP: Of course. Yes, it's been quite the journey, hasn't it? And I love it, it's a very stimulating environment. Choosing what gets published is always the hardest part. We have to think of many things: the appeal of the story and the characters, what readers might get out of it, the popular trends – thank blogs for that! It used to be so much harder to figure out, – whether it will attract more than just the young, and how we will be able to market it.

Me: I have heard about blogs several times already, talking to people from the industry. Was there a specific moment you noticed it started happening?

HP: Definitely! I would say it all goes back to the success of *Harry Potter* and how reluctant readers were to let go of the universe. So they started writing fan fictions and sharing them online, discussing their favorite characters or parts and what they wished happened differently, things like that. It's a goldmine for us. Fiction for the young has become so popular and it has so many ramifications in the media, it's almost as if it

was taking its revenge over so-called adult literature and the way it was belittled in the past.

Me: Would you say that its growing popularity sometimes affects the quality of what gets published?

HP: Some editors will publish anything but that is the case with every categorization, not just literature for the young. But unfortunately, we are all trying to find the next big thing and sometimes that can lead to poorer narratives being published.

Me: Do children and teenagers still read classics?

HP: Not as often, but thankfully school is there to compensate. Now it's all about the paranormal, the supernatural. Creatures and powers and far away lands. But these stories are almost always based on mythology and so, without even realizing it, young readers expand their knowledge. They learn about the founding myths and tales, upon which rest so many of our beliefs and novels. They also learn about different cultures and different takes on the same themes. I heard you ask one of my colleagues about vampires earlier. That's one example. And there are many more. So it's not a weak literature based on the sensational like some people like to say. It really has this amazing background and kids and teens can get a lot from their reading. Adults too! Also, the length of novels no longer is an issue, thanks to Rowling's success. There was definitely a before and an after *Harry Potter* that all of us in the industry have noticed. Now, massive tomes are no longer the prerogative of adults. We have discovered that children will read a lot if they get hooked, which gives writers more freedom to explore their plots fully, and as editors

we get better quality writings. And we sell more, because series appeal to the elder "nerdy" crowd. You have no idea how many books for the young we sell to 30 years old.

Me: Are there things that are purposely not discussed in fiction for the young? Or, conversely, things that are intentionally added?

HP: Not anymore. Now, every subject is approached, no matter how delicate or sensitive. There are stories about disease and suicide, abuse and divorce, homosexuality and the reign of beauty, TV realities and love. It can be anything really, and it's great that kids are given the opportunity to explore all these things and feelings in the safety of books. And it might help them start difficult conversations in real life. Heroes have become stronger in the past 15 years. Not in term of physical strength but in the mental bravery they display and the way they take charge of their fate. It calls for deeper and more lasting identifications on the readers' part, which I truly believe can help them dealing with their own difficult times. As for whether there are things that are purposely added, I would say no. I think the main visible difference is just that the characters are as young as the readers that the genre officially targets.

Me: Would you say that because the marketing of books for the young has become blurrier, with adults buying them, that the genre is slowly becoming less didactical?

HP: I'd like to believe that there are things to learn for all of us in all books. And, of course, the younger you are the more in construction you also are, so you need texts you can identify with and rely upon to help you out with how difficult growing up can be.

But every age has its hardships and fiction is always there to support you, no matter how old you are.

Me: Thank you very much!

HP: You are very welcome!

Interview with Céline Vial, editor at Flammarion Editions – November 29th 2012, Montreuil, France

Me: Good afternoon! And thank you for your time.

CV: Hi! You're welcome.

Me: You now mostly work with novels for big children and teenagers, which is the sector that has grown the most in the past 10 years. Can you talk about the selective process of the books that get published? How do you decide what might appeal to young readers?

CV: Well, it is true that the sector has been growing exponentially. The thing is: young adult literature, and even children's literature to a certain extent, is no longer the prerogative of the young. Some of the adults who grew up with series, usually in the field of fantasy, never let go of the universe. And there are some pretty good books that get written for kids and teenagers, so it's great that readers no longer feel stranded in labels. But anyway, the selection process! In terms of appeal, blogs, lots of blogs. And I know colleagues in other publishing houses use them too. We read about what teens like and think about, what they wish for and what bothers them, it's an amazing source of information and inspiration. And then there are the things that stand in the margins but are essential to the marketing, like a catching title and an attractive cover. We are still a lot influenced by the big titles coming from America or the UK, especially the ones that get made into films. But I'm proud to say that we have some really good authors and stories to offer in France as well.

Me: Speaking of an Anglo-Saxon's influence, as I was doing research I could not help notice the huge presence of supernatural creatures in fiction for the young. Werewolves, dragons, griffins, vampires, you name it, they are all there. But I was most intrigued with the vampire, as it has been plastered all over TV, films and books. My experience was that it held a different meaning in French narratives. Would you say that is the case?

CV: Hmmm, let me think. Different as in not all about a poorly disguised sexualizing?

Me: Yes, partly.

CV: Then I would say yes, absolutely. It's not like the French vampire, so to speak, is the figure of horror it used to be at the origins of the myth either. I don't know, there is just something more, something deeper about the inner person, the soul of the characters. I'm not sure where it comes from though. It's interesting you should raise it up. I think maybe because of the cultural difference. We have a very strong background in psychology and philosophy, and we're not religious. I don't know, that might be part of it.

Me: You mentioned earlier that more and more adults read fiction for the young. Does it imply that the lines between children and adults have been erased when it comes to literature? What are the things you look for as you target a specific age group?

CV: That's actually the hardest part of our jobs as editors. It's really difficult to figure out which age will like this or that story, and which narratives is the most appropriate for whatever age group. And our readers surprise us very often by what they decide to read, when the book they picked was not intended for them in terms of age. But we're all grown-ups, what do we know, right? As for what we look for and if it is the same as literature for adults, not completely. There are still some slight differences in terms of interests and worries and these are the things we pay attention to the most when we sort out manuscripts. We try to pick the ones that are not only entertaining but also enriching.

Me: Thank you very much.

CV: Thank you.

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- p.24: (x4) *Tonari no Totoro (My Neighbor Totoro).* Dir. Miyazaki, Hayao. Studio Ghibli, 2010 (1988). DVD.

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Biography:

A citizen of France, I have earned both my BA and MA from the University of Nantes, where I specialized in English and American language, literature and civilization. My interest in children's literature was already present and I wrote my Masters' thesis on the rewriting strategies (or "patchwork" writing) in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. It was the beginning of a thinking process that led me to question the very ideas of a fictional child and a literature designed for children. In 2007 I joined the faculty of the French department at Franklin and Marshall College, in Pennsylvania. I stayed there for two years and fell deeply in love with teaching and the mutual learning that comes along with it. In 2009 I started my PhD at Johns Hopkins University where I was able to both teach and research. Writing this dissertation has been a life-changing experience and I am grateful to Johns Hopkins for accompanying me through that process.

Publications:

- Fall 2013: Article: "Les héritiers de Libertalia : l'enfant pirate dans la littérature pour la jeunesse." Edition des *Actes du colloque international Pirates – Aventuriers – Explorateurs*; Boulogne-sur-Mer (12p)
- September 2012: Review article: "La littérature jeunesse en France: entre imaginaire et commerce." *Modern Language Notes*, Volume 127, Number 4, September 2012, French Issue, Johns Hopkins University Press, pp.973-976